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## "Panel Discussion on Jazz"

Dave Brubeck

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Dave Brubeck  
“Panel Discussion on Jazz”  
March 5, 1965  
Portland State College

Portland State University Library Special Collections and University Archives  
Oregon Public Speakers Collection  
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Transcribed by Marti Clemmons, April 2020

Audited by Carolee Harrison, January 2021

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*[This program consists of an interview with jazz musician Dave Brubeck by a panel of interviewers who are introduced, but who do not identify themselves and are indiscernible. Some comments are off-microphone and are partially inaudible.]*

MODERATOR: Dave’s playing tonight a concert at a public auditorium, culminating the jazz festival that Portland State has been putting on, Wednesday, Thursday, and tonight. Dave Brubeck is right here.

DAVE BRUBECK: Hi. [applause]

MODERATOR: Throwing the questions at Dave will be Jack Berry, the drama editor for the *Oregonian*, at the end down here. [applause] On Jack’s left is Jim Stovall, stereo jazz on KPFM from 7-8 each night. [applause] Dr. Graham Conroy, aestheticist... [laughter] Bob Crowley, music department at Portland State; [applause] Jimmy Helzer, second-year student... [unclear] [applause]

We can start the questioning off with whoever wants to start.

SPEAKER [unidentified]: Well, I have a question, we might start it rolling. I know many years ago, you started with an octet, I was wondering if you might trace the evolution from the octet to the present quartet.

[1:34]

BRUBECK: Right, the octet started after the Second World War and we were at Mills College and there were 3 GIs allowed to go there on the GI Bill. [laughter] He was there too. A little later, I think a year later; what year were you there, Bob?

BOB CROWLEY: Just in the summer of '47.

BRUBECK: Yeah. And my brother was teaching as an assistant to Darius Milhaud. I at that time had wanted to learn composition. And just before the war, I had taken one lesson from Milhaud and decided to go back there as soon as the war was over. And I talked a lot of my friends into going to Mills, and there were five of us in the octet registered at Mills and three more at Cal or San Francisco State. And of the eight of us, Cal Tjader was on drums, you've all heard of Cal. Paul Desmond was on alto saxophone, and Jack Weeks on trombone and bass. Dave van Kriedt. Bob and Dick Collins, and myself. We were all interested in composition, and much of the original music was homework for Darius Milhaud's class. If we were assigned a fugue, he encouraged us to bring our instruments into class and play them in class. All of us had kind of a history of being put down for playing jazz, and to have Milhaud, certainly one of the greatest musicians in the world, encourage us to play jazz and to play jazz in class was a tremendous experience.

I had attended a school where we had dared not play jazz in the conservatory unless we muffled it so no one could hear. And this was quite true of almost any conservatory in the country in the 30s and certainly part of the 40s. In the school I attended, College of the Pacific, we got around playing jazz by calling it "Radio Writing and Arranging." It was some course, in fact, a fellow from this part of the woods taught that later, Leighton Edelman; does anyone know him? So, the object really came into being... most of us were GIs who couldn't have afforded to study with Milhaud or go to Mills, and we were together four years and I think we had about three or four jobs, and eventually that got to us. I had to work, so I took the rhythm section of the octet, which would be Cal Tjader, Ron Crotty on bass, and myself, and formed the Dave Brubeck Trio, which some of you may have heard of, and it got quite well-known. And then I added Paul Desmond to the personnel of the trio, which started the quartet. The trio started about 1949 and went to about 1951; the quartet started about 1951 with Paul and I and

different rhythm sections up until 1956, [Joe] Morello joined, and in 1957 or 8—1957—Gene Wright joined and it's been the same ever since. So there is a brief history of the group.

[6:00]

SPEAKER [unidentified]: Well, that's a clue to your classical training. I think it brings about a question that seems natural for me to ask; there's been a lot of accent and talk lately about this so-called "third stream" in jazz music, an attempt to bring together music and feeling from classical, which is a bad word [...], it really doesn't fit too well, and the jazz idiom. And some of the things possibly you were doing, and the way in which you compose, but not so much probably as in the sort of things are done by the MJQ and Chico Hamilton and some of these people. Do you think that this is a possible development to the future of jazz, or do you think it's an experiment that you think may wear itself out? Or are there two types of music that are somehow coming together, knowing the differences?

[murmuring in background]

SPEAKER [unidentified]: Oh, they couldn't hear you.

[laughter]

SPEAKER [unidentified]: Oh. I was asking about the so-called "third stream" music that seems to be an attempt among jazz musicians to fuse together elements of jazz with the polyrhythmic change of time and key signatures in it, and ideas more straight-away from the so-called classical side of music, and many people are experimenting in this, such as the Modern Jazz Quartet; to some extent Tjader and others, and I was wondering what you feel about this as a future direction in jazz music. On the way up or the way out?

BRUBECK: Well, as usual, I'm always on the opposite side of everybody on a question. I avoid controversy by just not saying anything, but I'm stuck today. I think that there are so many myths in jazz that if people would really examine—and there are so many books written about jazz and so many ideas that if I say they are false, it makes good copy for critics. But as the Africans become educated, more and more Africans will say that our whole concept of jazz is false, and I'll wait around for ten or twenty years and I won't have to get myself too much involved. I could say that most educated Africans think jazz is very European, and they have a good right to say this, because you used the word "polyrhythmic," which we're just starting to use now in jazz, although I've used it for twenty years, not only the word but the rhythm. But had we reflected the African heritage, jazz would have been so polyrhythmic from the

beginning that what we are doing now would be nothing. If it reflected complicated rhythms of Africa from the time it started, instead of copying European music—and I'll tell you how they copied it, they copied the melody of a hymn or a march, they copied the form, even the modulation to the subdominant, the same as a trio in a march is the same thing in a rag. They use the same instruments, they use the same scales, what else is there left? A slight syncopation, and what else is there in music?

So it starts sounding very European, doesn't it. Some day we will discover that no European should ever feel ashamed of playing jazz, it's as much his as it is anybody's. And what we are doing today is far from a slavish copy of European music in comparison to the original jazz. There's a lot more independent thinking going on now in the forms we use; sometimes we even do something new; whereas in the history of jazz we usually follow twenty or thirty years behind what classical music has already done. For instance, the first time Whiteman hit a 9th chord and everybody flipped. You could find it in Debussy or somebody else 20-30 years sooner, and the same thing with what I'm doing. I've never claimed to do anything new harmonically unless it was a few brief moments once in awhile. We're not up with Schoenberg or Berg or Stockhausen, and we're not supposed to be. Because improvised music, up until recently, has been a music that collectively, everybody kind of has to know the rules. And now you're getting into a period where there's no longer any real rules in classical music, and that's been going on maybe twenty years with some people, inventing their own rules as they go, a complete point of departure from what was accepted, and jazz men are just arriving now, do you follow what I mean? We've always kind of been behind classical music and you must be behind if you are to collectively improvise. There has to be something that you all understand together.

SPEAKER [unidentified]: You talk about this collective improvisation. I'm curious to know how much you start out with, when you have a new tune, say, how far do you go in writing the notes down before you start rehearsing it with the quartet?

[12:10]

BRUBECK: Oftentimes, a theme is written, chord progression is given to members of the group or talked over. And from there on we are free; as long as it's structured, there's not change. And the ability of the musician is to fill the structure with as much as you can and make it as complicated as you can within the structure, and that's the way our group works. If you set one rhythm you can play polyrhythmically against it. We're always superimposing on the norm in my group as much as possible. If we feel like doing that, and we play polytonally as much as possible on certain tunes, so it's a polyrhythmic/polytonal concept.

SPEAKER [unidentified]: Would you say that *Countdown* is your album that most exemplifies what you are saying? *Countdown—Time in Outer Space*?

BRUBECK: Some of those do. Tunes like “Someday My Prince Will Come,” which are more natural. Sometimes we get some very good things going on there. Usually there is no record that comes near what we can do. That's the trouble with jazz.

SPEAKER [unidentified]: Well, we have something in store for us tonight.

BRUBECK: Well, I hope. There's no proof that it will happen tonight. [laughter]

SPEAKER [unidentified]: Years ago, you were quoted as saying that the quartet likes to play dances better than concerts. Is that still the case?

BRUBECK: Well, I love to play for dances. I hate to play in joints. I avoid them. I never turn down a dance. The only thing I hate is a white piano with a spangle on it. [laughter] Which... the next dance we'll play is in Salt Lake City, and they've got a horrible piano there, and they've just written me, if they get it tuned, will I please play it, because it costs \$150 and a lot of effort to bring a piano in. I love to play for dances. And I think that kids today don't know how to dance in a way that really moves me into playing, but there was a time when people could dance where you wish you could get a choreographer, or get a choreography like it; and during the war years... and I've played for audiences for, there'd be maybe 2000 people out there and all of them would be experts, doing fantastic things, and when somebody would get so good there'd be a circle formed around them and the whole audience would have a beat going, and you would play against that beat. And usually the most inspired I'd ever get was at a dance where there would be great dancers. If you played a real fast thing, you'd see the whole floor go into half time. And today if one couple has that much sense you'd think it was a miracle.

SPEAKER [unidentified]: Our mutual friend Lou Gottlieb once uttered the aphorism that “jazz is poor people having a good time.” Do you think that that seems to go along the same... maybe not poor, but...

BRUBECK: I can go along with that in some ways, because the best times I've ever had were in the days... Well, one reason I don't like nightclubs now is because I'm not anonymous, I'm known. Which makes a lot of difference. But when you're unknown and just having a good time with the people, and nobody is expecting you to do something fantastic, or nobody has paid their money to see *you*, you're just part of the audience, that's a different situation. I don't put

down nightclubs for other, young musicians. They're just wrong when I'm sitting there and some drunk can lean on the piano, that's gonna cause a lot of trouble. [laughing]

SPEAKER [unidentified]: [...] very expensive, for people who want [...] too... prohibitive that the jazz workshops in [...] we heard from you.

BRUBECK: Well, I have played in clubs that the atmosphere was so great that you hated for the place to close. You just... you'd play after hours, after you worked six hours you'd still be playing. And that was the good old days for me, and maybe some other people know about places like this, where just everybody is happy. There were no racial problems, no nothing. There were about three clubs in San Francisco—and I used to be the only white guy in a club called “Cool Corner”—and that to me was the greatest experience. Of course, in the clubs in San Francisco there were no racial problems. This was before the war. The war brought southern Negroes in that had problems, and southern whites that had problems, and pretty quickly San Francisco had problems. But there was a time when, to play in a jazz club like that, I would have played free every night, it was so great.

SPEAKER [unidentified]: Audience feedback and appreciation takes many forms. During one of your Eurasian tours a couple years ago, you played for two hours in front of an Indian audience, made up of a couple of thousand, and you received no applause, which was their way of thanking you or appreciating your music; but how does this feel from the position of a professional musician, when there is no feedback in this very strange situation. Is it still difficult to play to a no-feedback audience?

BRUBECK: If you know... [laughter] But people don't... About two months ago, I was booed, which was the first time I had really been good and booed. [laughter] We were booed, and I didn't know why we were booed—because we didn't play an encore. That was okay, we came back and played an encore and everything was all right. The next night, we played with the Berlin Philharmonic, and we were booed again. And I wasn't sure, and there were a few people back on stage on the side, so I grabbed one guy and I said, “What does ‘boo’ mean?” And he said, “No good.” [laughter] The conductor had said to me just then, “This is all for you, my dear.” And he had left. And we were stuck with this scene where there were people defending us, and people would hit us, they were booing, running all over. [laughter]

Now, I never did know why we were booed, because we could've been booed because it wasn't far out enough. It was a concert of very far out music... or they could have been booing the whole concert because it was far out. Or they could have been booing us because we were jazz with a symphony orchestra. And no warning—because there is a paid class, paid people and all

this stuff—and you can get booed in Paris too. I got out of that one all right. [laughter] We were booed before we started because I was late one time in my life, and I had done a radio show for the armed forces and the guy got lost on the way back to the concert; but audience reaction in different countries is tremendously different. In some countries they stamp on the floor and it sounds like a herd of buffalo. In Poland, the audience was silent after one number—which was a thing I'll never forget—and then applause. Because I had done a tribute to Chopin, and I thought maybe I had insulted the Polish people, but that worked out And in Turkey, if you play a ballad, the whole place gets restless, and coughing and out of their minds, so we learned to play faster tunes there the whole time. In India, we played in—the way they described it was—a vegetarian hotel. This was an audience that knew nothing about jazz, they never heard jazz before, but they wanted us to play there to present American jazz to these people. The next night would be all students, who would have... Where did this take place?

SPEAKER [unidentified]: Uh, it was near Pakistan. It's knowledge that I gained a couple years ago about your Eurasian tour. The audience was appreciative of your fine work...

BRUBECK: Oh, I know where this was!

SPEAKER: But it was their tradition not to clap... [both speakers talking at once]

BRUBECK: This was frightening. This was in the most isolated place I've ever played. It was kind of in central India. They didn't respond to almost anything that we did. It was quite unnerving to stay there for two hours. They finally responded to Joe Morello. So we didn't completely draw a blank... because harmonically they had no background, or melodically to follow what we were doing. I think that had a lot to do with it. That the idea that music is a universal language is a lot of baloney. [laughter] And you find that out when you are in a country where they don't... for instance, the minor mode can make somebody laugh in certain parts of the world where here we are supposed to be sad. [laughter]

SPEAKER [unidentified]: I've been wanting to draw you out on that a little bit, in that our youths were very similar, except that you had talent... [laughter]

BRUBECK: It's not true.

SPEAKER [unidentified]: Where I felt more and more in the last half dozen years or so that there are really, in this country, there are at least two worlds of music and the concert life and jazz life are very much further apart than I used to think so. Whereas in 1941, I would joyfully stand for four hours in front of Lionel Hampton's band or Duke Ellington's and feel no pain or



discomfort of any kind, I become bored now in 20 minutes, usually, in the presence of very, very good jazz musicians. Whereas when I started graduate school at Berkeley, I felt that I would never be beyond the inside of that wall. But now I take the same keen pleasure I did in jazz in those days in musical structures and relationships, and the kind of jazz... the reason why I'm bored with jazz is that it doesn't modulate and other resources for contrast, for example, to a large extent are exploited. But there are other values, which in concentrating on the values of composed music, one becomes indifferent to... or aware of. I think you... do you listen to a lot of jazz, apart from playing?

BRUBECK: Uh, no, I don't. There was a period when I listened to a lot of jazz. And I think you have to go through periods where you don't listen to many other jazz players... or if you are a painter, you don't watch all of your contemporaries, or if you are a writer you have to find yourself. I probably will come back now and listen to people like Ornette Coleman and people who are doing things that are too far out for me and find out what's going on. But for years I didn't want to copy anybody, I wanted to be on my own.

SPEAKER [unidentified]: Do you think it's probable that anything is going on? I think it's one thing for Ornette Coleman to impress Nat Hentoff; it's another thing for him to impress a musician. Certainly, if he is doing something profound, it's something of a miracle, is it not? To come out of a basic musical literacy and do something that is musically profound?

BRUBECK: Well, no. I don't agree with you. Because he did impress Gunther Schuller, John Lewis, and Leonard Bernstein. So that's why that's enough for me to think well, he's got something. In fact, Bernstein is supposed to have called him a genius in *Time* Magazine. I read it, and you can't believe everything you read. [laughter] I know he did go down there because we were playing at that time with the Philharmonic, and I know he did go down to hear him and he came back and he did say great things about him.

SPEAKER [unidentified]: Could you relate that? Would it be the same sort of thing as the fact that the first monodies were composed by ignorant people, by performers who... say Perry and Caccini, who were supposed to be very moderate composers. They revolutionized music in 1600 through doing something utterly new. Is it the newness that makes them a genius rather than a master?

BRUBECK: I'm trying to find out... how many of you are familiar with Ornette Coleman? I always go on the assumption that if somebody has a background up to the moment—and I checked on Ornette, and he's supposed to be completely familiar with everything of Charlie Parker's, he can play it. Then you start saying well, it's all right if he plays out of tune. And it's all right if he

uses Parker as a point of departure... now sometimes you'll hear somebody playing 12-tone kind of jazz and ask him to jam the blues and he can't do it, so you discredit this kid. And it's to the point now where you really don't... you can't judge anybody until you know their whole history. And so much of modern music that I dislike, the wild stuff that's going on now, I'm more inclined to think of the old guy that wrote *Ionisation*...

SPEAKERS [unidentified]: Varèse.

BRUBECK: Varèse might come out on top of the whole heap, because I talked to him and he said I graduated from the Players' conservatory the highest in counterpoint and fugue they ever graduated anyone in that year, and yet for years he has been doing these other things. When somebody puts their life into... One argument I had with Schoenberg, I asked him, why do you think you can direct music your direction? And he shut me up forever by saying, "Because I know more about music than any other man in the world." [laughter] If you really want to find out something, go to the person and ask them. They'll give you an honest answer.

SPEAKER [unidentified]: Here's another thing about Coleman. Somebody asked Miles Davis, either two or three years ago, what he thought... "Man, a cat's trying to pull my leg, he's trying to put me on." Then I hear that just recently he's come out to say Coleman is one of the greatest geniuses of the modern jazz era. So it turns out that some of the musicians themselves seem to be changing. This is something we are getting used to, certain patterns that seem to skew your whole visceral mind around, where you have to filter it through your brain and back into your intestines, later seem to be a thing that you begin to live with after a while. Still, Coltrane seems further out to me than Coleman does. You seem to get used to it after a while.

BRUBECK: Well, this is what you gotta always remember is, that often times, Frank Lloyd Wright was considered far out, and now most of the hot dog stands reflect his ideas. [laughter] Charlie Parker *was* far out, and yet I've heard a commercial recently that used a Charlie Parker quote. It's all these people that are constantly breaking the ice out ahead like a Parker was, like an Art Tatum, like a Duke Ellington, that opens up the whole scope for people to come in behind the ice breaker after somebody has broken through and kind of do something, because there has been somebody way out in front. Do you agree with that?

SPEAKER [unidentified]: To a degree. I feel that in general, in history, it's been easier to make up one's mind about qualities in the presence or in the absence of novelty than it is now. It seems to me very often now that novelty is everything, and that the very conception of quality is a problematic of what it would constitute. Parker, after all, was a tremendously grounded musician as in more or less his folkloristic culture. He served his time with Jay McShann and

played the blues and learned all the Lester Young solos by heart twice as fast. When heard, he spoke not... he spoke as a pinnacle of something which was only moderately individual; it was better, got you deeper more profoundly, but it wasn't so different, where as it seems to me more often now we are more conscious of novelty than of being reached at all. Mr. Hentoff—I happened to read, I don't read him habitually, but I think he had a column in the *Nation*—and he said the intellectuals were gonna have to pay their dues now and study if they were going to be up to date and understand Ornette Coleman. And I must say I don't know his work, but I don't think it's... the difficulty of understanding it is because it is complex. Do you?

BRUBECK: I don't know, I haven't listened enough to it. I have to... I've listened to enough of the real far out guys today to know that I don't believe they are on the right track.

SPEAKER [unidentified]: The last time you played here, [laughing] this may not please you, the last time I remember there was an old theatre, now torn down, and Charlie Parker played off... it was '53, I mean it wasn't the last time you played here, but last time in that kind of package. You, at that time, sounded very advanced compared to Charlie Parker, he was sort of the down home music. Again, most touching, very effective, but not as audacious, not as ambitious as your music by any means.

SPEAKER [unidentified]: Dave, I have sort of a practical question, I'd like to talk about the economic problems, a two-pronged question. First of all this new music, what sort of effect, what sort of economic consequences will it have if there's a great deal of difficulty for musicians to find work now as music becomes more remote and difficult? That will probably be something of a problem... Also, what sort of suggestions or comments would you make about keeping an interest in jazz alive in a city the size of Portland, which is too small to support a full-time jazz club featuring name artists. What do you have to say on...

BRUBECK: Well, I would think that if you were to start a jazz club, of course that's been going on for years, of trying to get enough members to bring in people who would help. This business about the guys getting too far out to have an audience, that's a big problem. Financially, jazz is a bad situation for anybody to be in, unless there is just a few people that can survive the whole thing. For years, I didn't really make enough to call it a living. Talk about paying your dues, you've got years where you won't really make enough to support yourself or your family. So I don't say, like [laughing] "Go into jazz" is a great future.

SPEAKER [unidentified]: As far as hearing jazz though, do you think... it used to be the case, and I don't get around enough to know now, but the gentleman said a "full-time jazz club with name artists." There was marvelous jazz played in Great Falls, Montana in my day, Charlie

Christian played great jazz in Deadwood, South Dakota before anybody had ever heard of him. Hundreds of places, I suppose, in Kansas City; if a person looks around, I'm sure a tiny proportion of the excellent jazz talent ever becomes "name" talent, it's just expensive to begin with. It's just people have never heard the name Bill Smith, who is a glorious player.

BRUBECK: Yeah. We're speaking of Bill Smith that's in Italy now, who's kind of existed off of prizes like the Prix de Rome, Prix de Paris, Guggenheim fellowships that he wins. His last letters to me said, "Over here, as soon as you're 30, you're old hat, no matter what you are doing. They are getting so far out." Now Bill played last year, he was here on a grant in New York where he could use an electronic lab and he made up his own tapes, but then he went back to this kind of convention of all the electronic composers in the world, and he's the only one that played live onstage against his own tape. He improvised on clarinet against his own tape, and he got a lot of recognition that way, which is very interesting to see that the jazz... um, I'm gonna get around to a point you're making, I think... just for fun, I'm going to say that I think jazz is more important than almost anything going on in the world. That oughta excite some people. And for the reason that we have brought improvisation back to the arts, and when you bring that back you're gonna save art forms that are dying on the vine.

SPEAKER [unidentified]: This brings me something I'd like to ask. You said that you enjoyed playing for dances; a number of years ago as an undergraduate we had Stan Kenton come to a dance and nobody could dance to him, and then the half that didn't come there to dance, but to listen were much more interested in following his variations and going through this, which in some way sort of killed it. And then I suppose people lost the desire to do so; I remember hearing Charlie Barnett a number of years saying ago the reason that big band went out is because people ceased wanting to dance. It seems in a small group you're almost forced into a club situation, or if you do play for a dance, if you don't play the more experimental type music, it would be very hard for people to take it, get it in through their viscera, where so much of this has been called wig music in that sense, its gotta be the thing, you've gotta use a little cerebration on it. You've got to think the things through, see the things played against each other, doesn't seem to go down to the feet so fast.

BRUBECK: Well, it's true that Kenton did get too complicated for the average dancer for awhile, but that period didn't last long. He has always been a good dance band. And he found out, like with *City of Glass* and that period, he was too far out for the dancers.

SPEAKER [unidentified]: Sort of imposes restrictions on small groups though, puts you at a club owner's mercy, in some cases. Art Farmer was making a case about this awhile back, that even

the musicians who paid their dues couldn't find enough work to actually support them in many cases, all the while winning the prizes and getting their names known.

BRUBECK: This is true. All I was really looking for was to make scale and just have a steady job. Almost all my friends couldn't even work in joints in San Francisco and make scale, and know we would be working most of the year. Even when you become partially known, you are kicked out and put on the road, and it's a life where you have to go out and create something all your own, and if you survive this you are paid way more in proportion to what you actually... You haven't changed as much, you see what I mean? Twenty years ago, I said I was gonna do or was starting to do the same things I'm doing today. I'd show up to work with a band, get fired the first night. Almost every band in San Francisco has fired me... [laughter] two or three nights, that's it. The joints wouldn't even keep us in there. We used to let one guy take turns being leader, it would be the same guys, you know; he said, "I fired you last week, get out of here!" [laughter]

SPEAKER [unidentified]: Dave, how are you affected by music of different lands? I know your jazz impressions of Japan and Eurasia and so forth, are these impressions or are you as such that you feel... are you influenced by the music that you sound in these places? Do you get around to hear the musicians locally there?

BRUBECK: You learn a tremendous amount from every culture, and when we are in these different countries, we spend a lot of time listening to the jazz musicians of that country. Hearing them play, asking them questions, and often getting into informal sessions with them. In India, you can hear so many tremendous musicians, drummers, and in Africa, the Middle East, Turkey; and naturally I'm always asking the musicians if I can visit with them and exchange ideas.

SPEAKER [unidentified]: And some of the Indians sit in with you too [...]

BRUBECK: Yes, we have them sit on stage with us. If you are on a state department tour, this is a very good thing to do, is to include some of their musicians with you or else try to include some of their music in some way in your program. If any of you get ever into a situation where you are in these various countries, it's a good idea to know something about the music before you get there, and then try to learn while you're there. The last album we did like this was *Jazz Impressions of Japan*, and I wrote the whole album while we were on tour and I would just jot down ideas. And then talk to musicians and get the idea of their music, and you can bring everything into jazz because it's kind of like a sponge. If there is ever going to be a universal music I think it will be jazz, and right now you have almost every part of the world contributing

to jazz, you have tremendous Japanese jazz musicians. And Russian, Polish, Middle Eastern, Turkish, Indian, and we've got a good chance of having an art form that will incorporate all the music of the world. There's very little music that I've heard that you couldn't use in jazz. That is another good thing about jazz.

SPEAKER [unidentified]: I'm wondering about the danger aesthetically, I think I have a two-pronged question. I'd like to try to frame it and then be quiet. First of all, I was wondering whether you have thought about playing for dancers. Would it lead to a conclusion that jazz is really a rather simple, utilitarian music to which... which probably can't and shouldn't be encumbered with elaborate structure? And the other prong in the question is that don't you find that in combining... this is a self-conscious process isn't it? It isn't really spontaneous, you're aware of one idiom and you hear another idiom that interests you, and you want to integrate these somehow. It always seems to me that whether this is the music of Schoenberg or the music of India, that you are going to get the effect of Beiderbecke coming into Whiteman's band, you have all this elaborate kitsch going on in the orchestra, and then you have 16 measures of purity afterwards. I just went out this morning and listened to the Turkish piece, "Blues a la Turk..." what is it?

BRUBECK: "Rondo à la Turk."

SPEAKER [unidentified]: Rondo à la Turk.

BRUBECK: "Blue Rondo à la Turk."

SPEAKER [unidentified]: And this is much more successful than what would happen with Whiteman, but it seems to me that there is a borderline of uneasiness there when you've had the 2+2+2+3, and you've had interesting similarities. As in so many pieces we have heard, after all this, [makes drum beat sounds], and it turns out that the development of the extraordinary material is routine and habitual, to a degree at least.

BRUBECK: Well, yeah, I will agree with you on that, except we are the first ones to do it. And we open a door, like I spoke of the icebreaker, and somebody can come along and do it better. I don't say that anything we have ever done is as good as it can be done. But I'll say, there better be four very good guys that are gonna play better in 5/4 time than our group. We would have... that is in 9/8, if I could improvise in 9/8 I would have stayed there, I went into 4 because I couldn't handle it, but that doesn't mean eventually that I won't.

SPEAKER [unidentified]: What would have made a difference if you stayed in 9/8?

BRUBECK: It's hard!

[laughter]

SPEAKER [unidentified]: Of course it is! What I'm getting at though is not the... not really the... I mentioned that as an example of this kind of piece. I tried to write a piece of this kind a couple of years ago; it was performed at the symphony and it didn't succeed nearly as well as your piece. It just makes me wonder whether it's really feasible. It seems to me the best jazz performance is gonna be very, very un-self-conscious, it's gonna be utilitarian, the great moments are gonna happen in a dance hall or saloon someplace when half a dozen drunks are listening.

BRUBECK: That's why I mentioned when he was talking about polyrhythm, I said go back to "Someday my Prince Will Come," which is a tune we don't have to worry about.

SPEAKER [unidentified]: I shouldn't mention your competitors, either, but Bud Shank has a thing out that uses some of the Indian ragas directly in their work and using Ravi Shankar on sitar.

BRUBECK: We did that first.

[laughter]

SPEAKER [unidentified]: I know you did, I know you did. Well that and some of the samba nova stuff that really swings hard.

BRUBECK: Well, you see, what you have to be careful of when you start comparing jazz and classical music, is that if you go far enough back in classical music, you'll discover that they too were once brilliant enough to improvise. And brilliant enough to not have to write everything down, and had good memories, and people could remember the melodies. They had a Bach that could write for his chorus on Sunday using the figured bass, and everybody knew enough about music that he didn't have to write out the parts. You go back far enough, and you're gonna discover that there are two types of music: good and bad.

SPEAKER [unidentified]: What do you think about Lukas Foss and his Improvisation Chamber Ensemble, are you familiar with that?

BRUBECK: Yeah, well, that's a good move in the right direction. And when you start talking about, "Am I bringing in foreign elements consciously into jazz, and bringing in other cultures?" If you want to be idealistic enough, you can think, it isn't against the law to think that maybe Adam and Eve's story is kind of true. But if that one isn't true, maybe two people did start the world, it's possible. I think it took two. [laughter] And that there is a basis for every kind of music in the world that is different, to still have the same root. Just as language could have had the same root. In this remote place in India, I heard a Spanish rhythm, and all of us heard it and looked up, it was a rumba. How in god's name it got there... because it's just unbelievable... Am I talking overtime here, is it time to quit?

[voices in background]

BRUBECK: To conclude... [laughter] I'll just leave it that maybe we all came from the same source. Maybe there's nothing really foreign to any of us. That when you get things so individual, and so removed from all of us, as much of modern art is today, that you can no longer communicate with all of us. And that jazz has a better chance of communicating on a far out level because it is spontaneous, and right there it gives you a chance to communicate; before the eyes of the audience, you are gonna do something good or you are gonna do something bad. Or you take a symphony orchestra where the composer is so removed that half the orchestra hates it, half will tolerate it; you don't have this force that's so necessary to have a great work of art, that's everybody believing at once in the performance. You kind of have this in a dance hall or an old joint, you don't have it in the contemporary situations in our concert halls today. I will fight for jazz against classical music, if we must separate the two, anytime. I'll conclude with that. It's a dirty trick to say I'll conclude...! [laughing]

SPEAKER [unidentified]: You've been very generous indeed.

[applause; program ends]