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“AT ONCE OLD-TIMEY AND AVANT-GARDE”:

THE INNOVATION AND INFLUENCE OF WILBUR WARE

Committee:

David Neubert, Supervisor

David Neumeyer, Co-Supervisor

Grayson D. Browning

Eugene Gratovich

Jeff Hellmer

Dave Oliphant

Phyllis Young

“AT ONCE OLD-TIMEY AND AVANT-GARDE”:
THE INNOVATION AND INFLUENCE OF WILBUR WARE

by

Karl Erik Haddock Seigfried, B.A., M.M.

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This treatise is dedicated to my parents in gratitude for their lifetime of support.

“AT ONCE OLD-TIMEY AND AVANT-GARDE”:
THE INNOVATION AND INFLUENCE OF WILBUR WARE

Publication No. _____

Karl Erik Haddock Seigfried, D.M.A.
The University of Texas at Austin, 2002

Supervisors: David Neubert and David Neumeyer

A Chicago-born, African-American bassist whose career as a performer reached from the 1930s into the 1970s, Wilbur Ware (1923-1979) had a percussive tone and an advanced rhythmic concept that set him apart from other leading bassists of his time. His playing was extremely bass-oriented; he did not emulate the phrasing of wind players, as did many other bass innovators in jazz, but created a very idiosyncratic and recognizable style that built on the acoustic properties and strengths of the instrument. This treatise addresses the lack of a comprehensive study of Ware by compiling a comprehensive biography, examining the roots of his playing in relation to earlier players (Page, Blanton, Crosby), situating him amongst his contemporaries (Chambers, LaFaro, Davis), analyzing his style as both accompanist and soloist (including work

with Coltrane, Monk, and Rollins), looking at his influence on the next generation of bassists (Favors, Haden, Garrison), and gathering together and annotating his recorded performances.

Specific issues addressed center around Ware's relationship to the music of earlier generations, his own, and the next. Ware himself acknowledges his debt to the bassists who came before him; the philosophy and work of these players is examined in light of Ware's own. Ware clearly stands in opposition to the general trends in bass playing evident during his first years in New York City; the question addressed here is how his approach worked with the musicians he performed with and how his playing affected the end result. Many writers posit a bass lineage following Ware that begins in the subsequent generation, and the players themselves have attested to their indebtedness to the older musician in one form or another; what this treatise examines is why his musical language fit so readily with the new music that was being developed by these younger bassists.

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CHAPTER ONE

BIOGRAPHY

. . . Wilbur Ware's bass playing is something that makes me go home
and try to write poems . . .¹

—LeRoi Jones

There has been a great deal written and said about Wilbur Ware (1923-1979) since he first became known on the national music scene in the late 1950s. Unfortunately, most of the information about his life and career has been recorded in the form of short, isolated mentions in newspaper and magazine articles, books on the music of his time, and liner notes to recordings. This chapter brings together the information from this multitude of sources to create a coherent narrative of Ware's musical career and follow the bassist from his first musical experiences in the church to his learning days as a young professional musician, from his time as an important figure on the Chicago scene to his period of major contribution in New York, and from his return to Chicago and immersion in the new music scene to his second stay in New York. Throughout this treatise, an emphasis is placed on the interconnectedness of the music scene during Ware's lifetime. Connections Ware made while starting out as a performer in Chicago lasted throughout his career and were instrumental in the success of his two stays in New York. Many of the musicians Ware worked with, was influenced by, or himself influenced crossed paths repeatedly in a vast network of

¹ LeRoi Jones, *Black Music* (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1967), 97.

musicians that stretched across the country and embraced several important regional scenes.

Wilbur Bernard Ware was born in Chicago on the 8th of September, 1923. His musical experiences started very early and were centered in the Sanctified Church headed by the Reverend Turner, his foster father. Turner, who played several instruments, including guitar and bass, was the principal musical influence in Ware's early musical education.² Ware later recalled that Turner played

among other things, saxophone, banjo, drums and a little piano . . . and after so many years, he decided to make a bass violin. He got some veneer wood, some little nails, a little glue, and he shaped it like a bass. He took two years to build that, and the only real things on it were the strings he bought and the bridge. He showed me how to play regular church tunes.³

Under his foster father's guidance, Ware taught himself to play the banjo years before coming to the bass. Before the age of four, he was accompanying the congregation on this earlier instrument, making his debut on "Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam."⁴ He also learned to play the drums, saxophone, and violin, and eventually performed on all the instruments as an accompanist in the church. Ware's first violin was made by Turner "out of veneer wood, but with real violin strings."⁵ When Ware was ten years old, his

² Leonard Feather, "Ware, Wilbur Bernard," in *The Encyclopedia of Jazz* (New York: Horizon Press, 1960), 453.

³ John Litweiler, "Remembering Wilbur Ware," *Down Beat*, December 1979, 27.

⁴ Orin Keepnews, liner notes to *The Chicago Sound*, by Wilbur Ware (Riverside OJCCD-1737-2, 1992, compact disc).

⁵ Quoted in Keepnews, liner notes to *Chicago Sound*.

foster father built him a “lemon-crate bass” and built the more sophisticated instrument two years later.⁶

First instrument was made for me by the Reverend Turner. He made it out of veneer wood and he spent the better part of two years making that. He was just a country preacher. He made one for me when I was real small . . . made one out of an egg crate, closed the end up and put some wire strings on it, and it was about the size of a cello.⁷

Ware quickly picked up the bass parts to the pieces played in Turner’s church; he was already familiar with being the engine keeping the forms and rhythms moving from having played drums with the congregation.⁸ Orin Keepnews reports that Ware was playing the second bass in church the night after Turner finished it and showed Ware “a few chord changes.”⁹ Soon after beginning on the bass, Ware was performing with amateur string groups in Chicago.¹⁰

As a child, Ware would play the second homemade bass on street corners with the kids from his neighborhood in “tramp bands.” The children would all play homemade instruments and pass the hat to passersby for tips.¹¹ During these first ventures into public performance, Ware was noticed by a future legend of the Chicago scene, tenor saxophonist Von Freeman, who was barely eleven months older than Ware but already hustling work for himself as a professional. He later recalled his first meeting with the young bassist, when Ware was still playing on his miniature

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Quoted in Brian Case, “The Bottom Line,” *Melody Maker*, 22 September 1979, 60.

⁸ Litweiler, “Remembering,” 27.

⁹ Quoted in Orin Keepnews, liner notes to *Chicago Sound*.

¹⁰ Feather, “Ware.”

¹¹ Litweiler, “Remembering,” 27.

instrument, and reflected on the personality of a man who, despite a reputation for being a joker, considered himself painfully shy:¹²

Freeman: Oh, he used to work with me. Well, Wilbur Ware, when I first met him, he was a street-corner musician. Man, he was playing a tub with a 2-by-4 and a string on it when I first heard him. I said, “Man, do you have a real bass?” He said, “Well . . .” I said, “Do you play acoustic bass?” He said, “I’ve got a baby bass.” I didn’t know what he meant, but he had a bass that was about a quarter-size bass. It was a real bass, but it was very small. I said, “Well, man, come and work with me.” He said, “Well, where?” I said, “Well, I’m playing a duo on the weekends. I’ve got two gigs, man.” I felt great to have these two gigs. And we were playing in a place up on the second floor in the Elks Hall. He said, “With two pieces?” I said, “Yeah, man, that’s all the man can afford to hire.”

So this cat made this gig with me, man, and honest to goodness, just bass and tenor. And this cat was playing . . . See, Wilbur’s conception was that he played the bass like maybe he’s playing two basses, like he’s walking and he’s playing another line. That’s just his natural style! And the cat at the time didn’t read, he didn’t know F from G, he didn’t know nothin’. But he had this great ear. You know, formally! But he was great, man.

So he said, “Well, listen, man, how many more gigs you got?” I said, “Well, I’ve got a few more little old gigs”—because then if you had ten gigs a year, you were lucky. So I was telling him, “Man, I got a couple of other little gigs, but you’ve got to read some arrangements.” He said, “Do you think I could learn to read?” I said, “Sure, man!” So he started coming by my house, and I started showing him a few things about counting. And the cat picked it up so quickly! He was just a natural genius on bass. And he always played down in the bass fiddle. And I used to try to get him to smile, and I’d say, “Wilbur, smile some, baby. Come on, get with me!” Because I was doing the five-step and everything else, trying to feed this family and all. So he got to the point where he could just read anything you put in front of him. And I said, “Man, how in the world can you learn to read that quickly?” He said, “You know, I feel like I always could read.” But that’s when I found out that some people don’t really need to read, man. It’s great if you can. But that man could hear anything you . . . He was a natural musician.

¹² Litweiler, “Remembering,” 85.

Interviewer Ted Panken: As he proved with Monk when he went out with him.

Freeman: Yeah, really. And a great cat. And he used to be so cool and so suave, until one night I heard him play the drums. He got on a cat's drums, and he goes crazy. So I found out, now, that's where his personality was. Because he kept great time on the drums. But he went nuts. He would start giggling and laughing! I said, "Man, get up off those drums and get back on the bass"—and he was very cool again! Wilbur Ware, man, he's a great cat.¹³

Ware himself recalled his first professional gigs coming at age ten or eleven, meaning that he was off to work almost as soon as the bass was in his hands.¹⁴

At age 14, he was hired by a tavern owner to play at his venue in the house band that backed up an act featuring a six-girl chorus line and a comedian. For the rest of his teens, Ware gigged around the Midwest and expanded his musical experiences by playing the dance band repertoire of the day.¹⁵

In these earliest days of his career, Ware already managed to break into the recording scene, cutting records with an assortment of blues artists, including Big Bill Broonzy.¹⁶ Still only fifteen years of age, Ware recorded with the singer and guitarist in 1938. Such extreme youth in the recording studio was not uncommon before or after. Chicago bassist Israel Crosby was sixteen when he recorded "Blues for Israel" with Gene Krupa in 1935, and trumpeter Lee Morgan was eighteen when he recorded his debut album for Blue Note in 1956 (with Ware in the band). It is not hard to

¹³ Ted Panken. "Von Freeman Musician Show, June 17, 1987, WKCR-FM, New York," <http://www.jazzhouse.org/library/>.

¹⁴ Case.

¹⁵ Litweiler, "Remembering," 27.

¹⁶ Case.

imagine Ware, with five years of bass playing and a wide range of experiences under his belt, jamming with the other players in “music typical of southside Chicago during this time.”¹⁷

Ware spent three years during the Second World War stationed in the Pacific.¹⁸ In 1946, he finished his military service and spent the next decade focused solely on the jazz scene in Chicago and around the Midwest. His musical knowledge continued to grow, and his ability to hear and react musically was developed out of necessity and practical experience.

I had to have my ears open . . . The singer says the tune’s in E flat, then starts singing in E—you got to transpose . . . You hear the saxophone player hit a note, and you get in there. Maybe you play two of his notes at the end of his phrase and go to something else, but you’re still keeping the same time. We called it “coattailing.”¹⁹

His work as a sideman during this period included backing up swing violinist Stuff Smith (perhaps best known for his hit song “I’se A-Muggin’”) and working in Milwaukee with trumpeter Roy Eldridge and saxophonist (and Charlie Parker disciple) Sonny Stitt.²⁰ Another Parker follower, Jimmy Heath (sometimes called “Little Bird”), recalls meeting Ware in Chicago in 1947. Among the clubs Ware performed at in Chicago were the Brass Rail and Lipp’s Lower Level (renamed the Blue Note by the late 1950s).²¹ While Ware was working with various musicians in the Chicago area in

¹⁷ Lawrence Cohn, liner notes to *Good Time Night*, by Big Bill Broonzy (Columbia CK 46219, 1990, compact disc), 6.

¹⁸ Litweiler, “Remembering,” 27.

¹⁹ Quoted in Litweiler, “Remembering,” 27.

²⁰ Case; Feather, “Ware.”

²¹ Orin Keepnews, liner notes to *Chicago Sound*.

the early 1950s, one of his bosses was trumpeter Oran “Hot Lips” Page, who had earlier played with the popularizer of the walking bass, Walter Page, in the bassist’s own Blue Devils, the Bennie Moten group, and the Count Basie band.²² Chicago tenor saxophonist Clifford Jordan recalls that Ware was playing drums when he first met him in 1951 but performed on bass when they first played together in 1955.²³

Up to this point, Ware had been working steadily in Chicago’s underground jazz scene both as a sideman and as a bassist who loved to sit in even when he wasn’t on the gig. His continuous presence paid off; after a night spent jamming at the Beehive with visiting artists Clifford Brown and Max Roach, the drummer’s band introduction (“On bass, Wilbur Ware”) was amended by the clubowner (“Wilbur Ware, who will open Monday and Tuesday with his trio”). Ware quickly put together a house band that ended up accompanying various touring artists coming through Chicago.²⁴

In 1953, Ware was leading the house bands at both the Beehive and the Flame Lounge. While playing in the group at the latter, Ware worked in 1953 with vocalist Joe Williams and in 1954 with both pianist Junior Mance and vocalist and alto saxophonist Eddie “Cleanhead” Vinson.²⁵ Between 1953 and 1955, Ware, Mance, and tenor saxophonist Johnny Griffin were featured in the “Breakfast Dance,” a local

²² Guy Kopel, “Au table d’honneur des pinceurs de cordes: Wilbur Ware et Scott La Faro,” *Jazz Magazine*, December 1959, 17.

²³ Ira Gitler, liner notes to *Mosaic*, by Clifford Jordan (Milestone MCD-47092-2, 2001, compact disc).

²⁴ Litweiler, “Remembering,” 27.

²⁵ John Curry, “Ware, Wilbur (Bernard),” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, ed. Barry Kernfeld (New York: Grove’s Dictionaries of Music Inc., 1988), 594.

tradition that kept the Flame Lounge open through the whole day every Monday.²⁶ Pianist Sonny Clark, with whom Ware later recorded, remembers: “I jammed with Wilbur Ware in Chicago in 1954 while I was touring with DeFranco. He knocked me out.”²⁷ Within three years, Ware would himself be touring with clarinetist Buddy DeFranco; first, however he went out on the road with Vinson between 1954 and 1955.²⁸ Joining the band with him in 1954 were his partners from the Flame Lounge, Mance and Griffin.²⁹ During those same years, Ware and Campbell together made up the Beehive house rhythm section.³⁰

Although their most famous public partnership was to happen in New York two years later, the first public performances of Ware and pianist Thelonious Monk occurred in Chicago in 1955. Johnny Griffin remembers getting the call:

One evening, in 1955, I was in Chicago visiting with my mother and watching television. The telephone rang. It was Wilbur Ware. “Come on over to the Bee Hive, man,” he said. “We need a horn player.” The cats on the gig were Thelonious Monk, Wilbur Campbell, Ware, and of course myself.³¹

Despite their association in New York in the late 1950s and again in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Ware stated that this was “the only time [he] ever rehearsed with Monk.”³²

²⁶ Orin Keepnews, liner notes to *Chicago Sound*.

²⁷ Quoted in Robert Levin, liner notes to *Dial “S” for Sonny*, by Sonny Clark (Blue Note CDP 7243 8 56585 2 5, 1997, compact disc).

²⁸ Feather, “Ware.”

²⁹ Case.

³⁰ Orin Keepnews, liner notes to *Chicago Sound*.

³¹ Quoted in Dempsey Travis, *An Autobiography of Black Jazz* (Chicago: Urban Research Institute, Inc., 1983), 358-359.

³² Quoted in Litweiler, “Remembering,” 27.

Bassist Richard Davis recalls both the heady atmosphere of the Chicago music scene during these years and the stature of Ware in the city:

Chicago was wide-open. I mean, you could go to jam sessions, like, five or six o'clock in the morning. That's when they started, breakfast jam sessions. That's when I met the great [drummer] Ike Day and Wilbur Ware, playing at these sessions. So you had all that music just flowing around you. It was just wide open.³³

Bassist Malachi Favors remembers Ware's time in Chicago in the 1950s as the most creative time in his career: "It's too bad that the people in New York didn't hear him before his addiction hurt him. He was also a picturesque bassist—he had a king-like posture."³⁴

In 1956, Ware sat in with drummer Art Blakey's group and ended up joining the Jazz Messengers with Chicago saxophonist Ira Sullivan.³⁵ Already addicted to heroin, Ware was initially reluctant when he got the wire from Blakey asking him to join the group: "Go to New York? Unh-unh! I didn't even have a suit of clothes. I was just breezy, you know."³⁶ In June 1956, however, he toured with Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers and ended up in New York City at the end of the run. This working group was the first lineup of the Messengers after the departure of pianist Horace Silver, who founded the group with Blakey. It was only together for two months and never actually

³³ Ted Panken, "Ted Panken's Chicago Transcripts: Richard Davis, August 18 1993, WKCR-FM New York," <http://www.jazzhouse.org/library/>.

³⁴ Quoted in Litweiler, "Remembering," 82.

³⁵ Case.

³⁶ Quoted in Litweiler, "Remembering," 82.

worked in New York.³⁷ Although Ware's short stay with the Messengers was only a momentary blip in the long history of that group, it was important both for bringing Ware together with Blakey (with whom he would record in Monk's group) and for getting him to New York, where his greatest musical contributions were to occur.

Thelonious Monk was the person who first brought Ware to the attention of Orin Keepnews, producer at Riverside Records.³⁸ During his following years in New York, Ware worked as the house bassist for the label and played on several sessions that would become classic recordings. Despite his work at the label and in live settings, ongoing money problems forced him to pawn his bass repeatedly: "As long as I was working, the fiddle was around. But if I wasn't working, I'd pawn it and get it out Monday morning."³⁹ Ware's studio work for Blue Note, one of the city's other major jazz labels, began with a rhythm section put together by producer Alfred Lion: Horace Silver, Ware, and drummer Philly Joe Jones. They recorded an album under J. R. Monterose's name on October 21, 1956 and one under Lee Morgan's name on November 4, 1956. Silver and Jones had only recorded together once previously, a

³⁷ Ira Gitler, liner notes to *The Jazz Messenger*, by Art Blakey (Columbia CK 47118, 1991, compact disc).

³⁸ Orin Keepnews, "Thelonious and Me," in liner notes to *Thelonious Monk: The Complete Riverside Recordings*, by Thelonious Monk (Riverside RCD-022-2, 1986, compact disc box set).

³⁹ Quoted in John Goldsby, "The Tradition: Wilbur Ware," *Bass Player*, July/August 1994, 75.

month prior to the Monterose date; they were both featured on bassist Paul Chamber's recording *Whims of Chambers*.⁴⁰

1957 was a year of great significance in Ware's career, both in terms of recordings and live performances. One of his many musical associations that year was with Buddy DeFranco, with whom he worked in New York and also went out on the road.⁴¹ On June 25, 1957, Ware participated in a studio session led by Thelonious Monk that resulted in a major recording that did not actually include the pianist himself. In the liner notes to the original release, producer Orin Keepnews wrote: "The leader [Monk] had left, but the others in his star cast were still on hand; a blues was suggested, a figure was improvised, and they were off."⁴² The band, there to work on the record that would become *Monk's Music*, included Ray Copeland (trumpet), Gigi Gryce (alto sax), John Coltrane (tenor sax), Coleman Hawkins (tenor sax), and Ware's former boss, Art Blakey, on drums. Keepnews later expanded on his description of the event:

According to reliable sources, [Monk] had stayed awake for several days preparing his music, and he arrived on time for what was scheduled as the first of two consecutive sessions. Almost everyone was there, but Art Blakey did not show up for nearly an hour. By then, Monk was close to losing his fine edge. [The band records a take of then-new composition "Crepuscle with Nellie"] . . . then it becomes quite clear that he is finished for the evening.

⁴⁰ Bob Blumenthal, liner notes to *The Complete Blue Note Lee Morgan Fifties Sessions*, by Lee Morgan (Mosaic MD4-162, 1995, compact disc box set), 3.

⁴¹ Feather, "Ware"; Brian Priestley, "Ware, Wilbur Leonard," in Ian Carr, Digby Fairweather, and Brian Priestley, *Jazz: The Essential Companion* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1988), 522.

⁴² Orin Keepnews, liner notes to *Blues for Tomorrow* (Riverside RLP-243, 1958, compact disc).

At this point I turned practical; aware that the band would have to be paid anyhow, I requested a six-man, pianoless blues, later issued on an anthology album titled “Blues for Tomorrow.”⁴³

It is noteworthy that Ware, while trading phrases with Blakey, uses the body of the bass as a percussion instrument almost two years before Charles Mingus used the same technique on a 1959 recording while trading phrases with drummer Dannie Richmond on his own altered blues, “Nostalgia in Times Square.”⁴⁴ This use of the bass as a drum would become commonplace in avant-garde, classical-language compositions in the next decades, especially in the works composed or commissioned by bassist Bertram Turetzky, who was himself greatly influenced by Mingus’ approach to bass technique.

Of the major musical events to occur in 1957, perhaps none is more fondly remembered by witnesses and more revered by historians than the extended residency by the new quartet led by Thelonious Monk at New York’s Five Spot Cafe at 5 Cooper Square in Greenwich Village. The Thelonious Monk Quartet that featured both Ware and tenor saxophonist John Coltrane was “a group and an occasion important enough to have become fabled within six months of its existence.”⁴⁵ The engagement at the Five Spot served as a pivotal point in the career of the two frontmen, both of whom were major players in the development of jazz. Monk finally gained recognition for the music he had been playing since the 1940s, and Coltrane made significant

⁴³ Orin Keepnews, “The Thelonious Monk Sessions,” in liner notes to *Thelonious Monk: The Complete Riverside Recordings*, by Thelonious Monk (Riverside RCD-022-2, 1986, compact disc box set).

⁴⁴ Charles Mingus, *Jazz Portraits: Mingus in Wonderland*, Blue Note CDP 7243 8 27325 2 5, 1994, compact disc.

⁴⁵ Martin Williams, *Jazz Changes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 93.

breakthroughs in his approach to harmony and line. The members of the group had worked together before, but not in a live performance setting; on April 15, 1957, Ware went into the studio with Coltrane and Monk to record a trio version of “Monk’s Mood” that was to be the one group track on an album of otherwise solo piano performances by Monk. At this point, Coltrane was still working in Miles Davis’ group.⁴⁶

The live performances of the group did not begin until several months later. Since July 4, Monk had been working at the Five Spot with a trio that included drummer Frankie Dunlop. Monk asked Coltrane to join the group starting on July 18, and made an offer of a one hundred dollar weekly salary to lure the saxophonist away from his weekly seventy-five as a leader at Brooklyn’s Coronet.⁴⁷ Dunlop “didn’t have sufficient time in on his Local 802 card,” and Shadow Wilson was called in as a replacement.⁴⁸

Ware continued to record while working at the Five Spot, and it was after a date co-led by Monk and baritone saxophonist Gerry Mulligan that Ware lost the gig with the quartet. According to Orin Keepnews, who produced the recording session,

August 12, it turned out, had been the last night for the original Monk/Coltrane quartet: at the end of the [recording] session on the 13th, Ware brought his bass back down to the Five Spot, left, and never returned. There were conflicting explanations, but later that evening Ahmed Abdul-Malik was hired as a permanent replacement.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Lewis Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998), 107.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁴⁸ Ira Gitler, “Monk’s Drummer Frankie Dunlop,” *Down Beat*, 16 January 1964, 16.

⁴⁹ Orin Keepnews, “Sessions.”

Ware explains his termination as a tale of misunderstanding. Looking back on the incident in 1977, he recalled that, after hurrying to get his bass to the club at the conclusion of the afternoon recording session, he turned to early-arrival John Coltrane and said, “I’m going to go around the corner to get a sandwich; I’ll be right back.” His tuna sandwich made him sick enough to go home in a cab and call a substitute bassist. Ware’s belief was that clubowner Joe Termini persuaded Monk to replace him on charges of unreliability.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, the only recording of this important group currently known to exist is a set of three studio tracks that was recorded in July of 1957.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Porter, 318.

⁵¹ There is some disagreement about the length of time Ware spent working with the Thelonious Monk Quartet. Leonard Feather places Ware in the group in 1957 and 1958 (“Ware”). Brian Priestley gives the dates as 1957-early 1958 (“Ware”). Ira Gitler states that the quartet lineup featuring John Coltrane worked for six months at the Five Spot Café starting in the summer of 1957 [Ira Gitler, liner notes to *Thelonious Monk with John Coltrane*, by Thelonious Monk (Jazzland JCD-46-2, 2000, compact disc)]. Richard Cook and Brian Morton agree with the six-month mark for the group with Coltrane [Richard Cook and Brian Morton, *The Penguin Guide to Jazz on CD, LP & Cassette* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 913]. Bill Cole also concurs with the six-month stay [Bill Cole, *John Coltrane* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), 57], but he goes on to say that Ahmed-Abdul Malik replaced Ware “near the end of [Coltrane’s] tenure” (Ibid., 64). John Litweiler puts the duration of that particular group as three months in 1957 (“Remembering,” 82). The date of July 18/19 is the most trustworthy for the starting date; Lewis Porter reports:

The dates and personnel were unearthed by researcher and writer Peter Keepnews, who is working on a biography of Monk, from the files of Joe Termini, former co-owner of the Five Spot. *Down Beat* (July 25, 1957) announced that Monk’s “trio” would begin on the nineteenth; Keepnews is more reliable (p318).

For the end date of Ware’s tenure with the group, Keepnews’s date, tied to a specific recording session and corroborated by Ware himself, seems accurate.

In addition to working as the house bassist for the Riverside label, Ware worked in the office, as did drummer G. T. Hogan. While working at this day job, he was given a surprise announcement by a label official that he was to lead a record date the following day.⁵² On October 16 and November 18, 1957, Ware went into the studio for his only issued date as a leader, on the suggestion of producer Orin Keepnews. Through happenstance, several of Ware's partners from his earlier days in Chicago were available in New York; John Jenkins, Johnny Griffin, Junior Mance, and Wilbur Campbell all made the session.⁵³ The recordings were released under Ware's name as *The Chicago Sound*, an album which features two Ware compositions, "Mamma-Daddy" and "31st and State," his first originals to appear on record since "Riff-Raff" from Johnny Griffin's 1954 Argo LP recorded with Ware back in Chicago.

On November 3, 1957, Ware played a night at the Village Vanguard in Greenwich Village that was recorded by Blue Note records as the first live LP by tenor saxophonist Sonny Rollins and the first live recording made at the club.⁵⁴ Rollins was originally hired by the club for a two-week engagement as the leader of a quintet, but, after the first week of his residency, he fired Donald Byrd (trumpet), hired a new rhythm section, and then went through an almost daily rotation of pianists before settling on the trio format.⁵⁵ The two remaining members, bassist Donald Bailey and

⁵² Litweiler, "Remembering," 82.

⁵³ Goldsby, "Ware," 71.

⁵⁴ Peter Niklas Wilson, *Sonny Rollins: The Definitive Musical Guide* (Berkeley: Berkeley Hills Books, 2001), 146.

⁵⁵ Wilson, 18; Leonard Feather, liner notes *A Night at the Village Vanguard*, by Sonny Rollins (Blue Note 7243 4 99795 2 9, 1999, 2 compact discs).

drummer Pete LaRoca, were both fired after the afternoon performance on the 3rd, and Ware and Elvin Jones were called to do the evening show, the recordings of which became the original album release.⁵⁶ Rollins had earlier played with Ware in Chicago, and later spoke of working with the Ware/Jones rhythm section:

As I recall, I was trying to get them for the entire session but they did not arrive until after the matinee had ended. . . . In retrospect, that was probably something I did not like doing, getting Elvin and Wilbur while these other guys were on the gig. But I had to do it, because I wanted to play with Elvin and Wilbur, and I wanted them on the record.⁵⁷

Another version of the story reports that Rollins asked Ware to sit in on the session, and that Ware ended up playing on a borrowed bass for almost all of the afternoon and evening performances.⁵⁸

In 1958, Ware won first place in the “New Star” division of the *Down Beat* critics’ poll; that same year he led his own trio at the Cafe Bohemia,⁵⁹ usually on Monday nights, and performed there regularly as a sideman with players including DeFranco, Donald Byrd, Art Taylor, and Max Roach. Ware’s trio also worked occasionally at Birdland;⁶⁰ Cecil Taylor’s drummer Dennis Charles recalled in 1963 that he had earlier played there in Ware’s group.⁶¹

Orin Keepnews describes two recording session incidents with Ware and Monk that precluded further release of recordings featuring the two playing together. The

⁵⁶ Wilson, 147.

⁵⁷ Eric Nisenson, *Open Sky: Sonny Rollins and His World of Improvisation* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 119.

⁵⁸ Litweiler, “Remembering,” 82.

⁵⁹ Feather, “Ware.”

⁶⁰ Goldsby, “Ware,” 71.

⁶¹ Jones, 89.

first was on February 25, 1958: “Interestingly enough, [Monk] had been quite willing to work with Wilbur (it was six months since the bassist had been replaced at the Five Spot), but what really broke up the record date was Ware’s stubborn and lengthy insistence to Monk that the bass part on *Coming on the Hudson* was impossible to play.”⁶² Despite whatever words may have flown at the session, the recorded evidence tells a somewhat less condemning story. Ware’s take of the tune can be compared side-by-side with that of his replacement, Ahmed Abdul-Malik, both of which are available in *Thelonious Monk: The Complete Riverside Recordings*. The version with Malik was recorded live at the Five Spot on August 7. Ware sounds stronger and more confident throughout, and he is more successful in terms of intonation, note-choice, rhythm, and musical synchronization with Monk. Ware locks in tightly with regular drum partner Philly Joe Jones, while Malik and Roy Haynes never quite mesh. Monk’s piano parts on the two recordings are telling. On the Ware version, Monk is already playing sparsely at the beginning of saxophonist Johnny Griffin’s solo, eventually laying out completely for most of the saxophone solo and all of the short bass and drum solos. On the Malik version, Monk’s playing is much more active throughout the saxophone solo, perhaps to make up for the bassist’s uncentered tone and lack of rhythmic drive.

Then, on May 7, 1958, Ware was scheduled to play on the session that would become Clark Terry’s *In Orbit* album. Keepnews explains why Sam Jones was called at the last minute to replace Ware: “Terry had hired Wilbur Ware, and we spent quite some time the first day waiting for him before making an emergency phone call.

⁶² Orin Keepnews, “Sessions.”

[Wilbur's remarkable and original talent caused many of us to try to overlook his immense unreliability, but that eventually became impossible.]”⁶³ However, Ware was not the first bass player to have trouble with Monk in the studio. On October 19, 1956, while working on recording Monk's “Brilliant Corners,” Oscar Pettiford and the pianist had problems.

Late in the evening, Pettiford and the leader exchanged harsh words, leading to an amazing situation that perhaps could only have happened on this night. During one take, we in the control room were sure the bass mike was malfunctioning: Oscar was obviously playing, but not a sound could be heard. The unpleasant truth was that the bassist actually was not playing; he was merely pantomiming quite convincingly! (Not surprisingly, this was the last time Monk and Pettiford ever worked together.)⁶⁴

In August 1958, Ware was one of the musicians who got out of bed early and posed for Art Kane's now-legendary group photograph of players on the New York music scene, “A Great Day in Harlem,” which also includes bassists Milt Hinton, Chubby Jackson, Charles Mingus, and Oscar Pettiford. Ware may or may not have accepted Art Blakey's offer to purchase him a bass when he joined the Jazz Messengers in 1956, but he became the owner of Oscar Pettiford's instrument when the star bassist moved to Europe in 1958.⁶⁵

Leonard Feather and Brian Priestley both state that Ware spent Summer 1959 working with J. R. Monterose in Albany before moving back to Chicago in October.⁶⁶

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Goldsby says he turned it down (Goldsby, “Ware,” 71), Litweiler says he took it (“Remembering,” 82).

⁶⁶ Feather, “Ware”; Priestley, “Ware,” 522.

However, Ted Curson places Ware in New York as one member of the often-changing rotation in Charles Mingus' group during its residency at the Showplace, which lasted from January through October of 1960.⁶⁷ Also in 1960, Ware performed in Newport during the "anti-festival" that ran during the week preceding the 4th of July with Kenny Dorham's group (which included Allen Eager, Teddy Charles, and Art Taylor).⁶⁸ The *Down Beat* report on the concerts has a photograph of a performing group made up of Ware, Don Cherry, Art Taylor, Allen Eager, and Walter Benton.⁶⁹ On August 15, Ware played in a two-bass rhythm section with Nabil Totah in a group led by Charles Mingus on piano for a night at the Village Vanguard when Mingus substituted for Oscar Peterson.⁷⁰

In 1961, Ware joined Eric Dolphy for an evening of sitting-in with the Coltrane group at the Village Gate, which at the time featured a two-bass rhythm section with Art Davis and Reggie Workman.⁷¹ Eric Dolphy reports, "Wilbur Ware came in and up on the stand so they had three basses going."⁷² That same year, Coltrane was looking for a new bassist for his group, and mentions the difficulty of locating Ware:

The way [Elvin Jones] plays, a bassist has to be a force of nature, because he plays with such force that if you don't respond with the same authority, you're practically smothered. With Elvin, it's necessary to

⁶⁷ Brian Priestley, *Charles Mingus: A Critical Biography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1982), 110. Mingus was most likely playing piano on these occasions.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁶⁹ Gene Lees, "Newport: The Trouble," *Down Beat*, 18 Aug 1960, 21.

⁷⁰ Priestley, *Mingus*, 129.

⁷¹ Valerie Wilmer, *As Serious As Your Life: The Story of the New Jazz* (Westport, Connecticut: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1980), 37.

⁷² Quoted in Valerie Wilmer, "Conversation with Coltrane," *Jazz Journal*, January 1962, 2.

have a flexible bassist, because he's often ahead of the tempo: it's necessary at the same time to follow him and to precede him. It's very difficult, and I don't know at the moment an available bassist who is able to do that. Possibly Wilbur Ware, but he's so available that nobody knows what's become of him!⁷³

In 1963, LeRoi Jones described two concerts that were part of an innovative way of presenting new music in New York when work for those performing adventurous music became difficult to secure. Audiences were alerted by ads in the *Village Voice* and hand-written flyers to “formally arranged concerts in lofts featuring some of the very best young New York based musicians.”⁷⁴ Ware performed on at least two such concerts. The first featured a trio of Ornette Coleman's trumpet partner Don Cherry, Ware, and Coleman's drummer Billy Higgins at a loft on Great Jones Street, with saxophonist John Tchicai sitting in with the group for the final works of the evening. The same trio performed the second concert described by Jones, this time on Clinton Street on the lower East Side, with Henry Grimes alternating bass duties with Ware and Earl Coleman (best known for singing “Dark Shadows” on a recording by Charlie Parker in 1947) performing with the trio.⁷⁵

Later in 1963, Ware moved back to Chicago because of illness,⁷⁶ ending what Litweiler called his “first New York period.”⁷⁷ Ware spent a large part of that year in a hospital being treated for tuberculosis and performed infrequently for the middle part of

⁷³ Porter, 200. Coltrane is making a joke here; calling Ware “available” means that he isn't playing anywhere and is not to be found on the music scene.

⁷⁴ Jones, 96.

⁷⁵ Jones, 97-98.

⁷⁶ John Curry, “Ware.”

⁷⁷ Litweiler, “Remembering,” 27.

the decade.⁷⁸ By 1967, Ware was playing strong in Chicago as one of the city's "prime sitters-in," hanging out with Roscoe Mitchell and guesting with such artists as Andrew Hill and Thurman Barker.⁷⁹ After going to New York and back again, Ware was diving into the new underground music scene in Chicago, much as he had done in the early 1950s.

In 1968, Ware was back in New York and had joined Archie Shepp's group, performing and recording with the saxophonist on and off through the first years of the 1970s.⁸⁰ Also in 1968, Ware led a recording session that was never issued for a label that was out of business by the late 1970s. The date featured Don Cherry of Ornette Coleman's groups and Clifford Jordan (who had performed with Mingus, among others).⁸¹ In 1969, he worked with Clifford Jordan, Elvin Jones, and Blue Mitchell.⁸² He also worked and made a television appearance with Sonny Rollins, his partner from the Vanguard date.⁸³ In 1969 and 1970, Ware again worked with Monk.⁸⁴ One of the lineups of the Thelonious Monk Quartet featured longtime Ware collaborator Philly Joe Jones and an old friend from Chicago, Sun Ra student Pat Patrick.⁸⁵ During the 1970s, Ware worked with three different Monk Quartet lineups, in addition to working with

⁷⁸ Ibid., 85.

⁷⁹ John Litweiler, "In Person: Andrew Hill and Two Others," *Jazz Monthly*, October 1967, 28.

⁸⁰ John Curry, "Ware."

⁸¹ Litweiler, "Remembering," 85.

⁸² John Curry, "Ware."

⁸³ Litweiler, "Remembering," 85.

⁸⁴ Cole, 318.

⁸⁵ Valerie Wilmer, "Ware on the Bass," *Melody Maker*, 12 June 1971, 14.

Shepp, Clifford Jordan, and another partner from his earlier New York days, tenor saxophonist Hank Mobley.⁸⁶

In early 1971, Ware replaced Mingus for the first two nights of the bandleader's engagement at Slug's when Mingus was having side-effect problems from the powerful medication he was taking.⁸⁷ At that point, the two were living in the same neighborhood. Ware had taken up residency on Avenue B in New York's lower East side and was living near Mingus, Philly Joe Jones, and Ornette Coleman's drummer Ed Blackwell; none of these major figures were working more than two nights per week.⁸⁸ Vocalist Joe Lee Wilson recalls those dark days, when the astounding rise of rock music's popularity had given plenty of extra free time to formerly busy music stars, including Ware's old partners Kenny Dorham and Clarence Sharp.

Kenny Dorham and I used to hang at Tompkins Square Park, Ave B and 8th Street. I met him in the park. Everybody hung out in the park — you drink a little wine and talk. Wilbur Ware, C Sharp, Rashied Ali and Muhammad Ali's brother who plays congos. [We hung out for] many years.⁸⁹

Mingus had a change of situation in the Spring with the award of a Guggenheim fellowship for composition and the publication of his autobiography, *Beneath the Underdog*.⁹⁰ Ware was not so lucky. He told British journalist Valerie Wilmer in June of 1971 that work was getting harder and harder to come by, and that he was trying to

⁸⁶ Litweiler, "Remembering," 85.

⁸⁷ Priestley, *Mingus*, 184.

⁸⁸ Wilmer, "Ware."

⁸⁹ Quoted in Lionelle Hamanaka, "Meet Joe Lee Wilson," <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/iviews/jlwilson.htm>.

⁹⁰ Priestley, *Mingus*, 185.

put together a trio with Philly Joe Jones and pianist Red Garland, the latter of whom had recently returned to New York after spending a decade in Dallas.⁹¹

Contradicting the later remembrances of Von Freeman, Ware lamented in 1971 that he was losing work due to his music-reading limitations. His language shows both a true humility and a sadness at the direction the music scene had taken by the early 1970s.

I do regret not learning more because I believe that if I knew more technically, I would have more offers of more jobs. I'd at least be able to think about getting into the studios and making more money, but a lot of the guys won't hire you just because you can't read.

Then again there are some guys who have been at the stage where they played good but after they learned to read, they couldn't play anything unless it was written. The funny part about it is that people are always talking about me and saying good things but I know deep in myself, in my heart, that if I could learn to read, I'd be better off financially. But well—I enjoyed what I did.⁹²

Bassist Malachi Favors corroborated Ware's problems with notated music in 1994 as he remembered his early years as a student of Ware:

Well, I studied with him as far as I could. You know, Wilbur Ware didn't read. He generally played by ear. So you just had to pick up from him by listening to him. He was just a born musician. He had the talent . . . It's just unexplainable. He didn't read. He could tap-dance, play drums, and that was it. And when I heard him, he just blew me away.⁹³

John Litweiler draws a parallel between Ware's tap dancing and his approach to the bass: "The image is perfect: Ware's perfectly differentiated notes dancing

⁹¹ Wilmer, "Ware."

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ted Panken, "Ted Panken's Chicago Transcripts: Lester Bowie & Malachi Favors, November 22, 1994, WKCR-FM, New York," <http://www.jazzhouse.org/library/>.

atop the beat, yet guiding the rhythm.”⁹⁴ For a player whose performances exhibit such a strong sense of rhythmic variation and ingenuity, the connection is particularly appropriate.

In 1972, Ware moved to Philadelphia. Various sources report that he worked in 1973 with Sun Ra,⁹⁵ whom he knew and had played with in his early Chicago days, but they may merely refer to a visit Ware made that year to the House of Ra on Morton Street in Philadelphia. While there, he played with members of Ra’s Arkestra for a performance that was recorded on tape.⁹⁶ In 1975, Babs Gonzales reported that Ware was “appearing all over the East Village and jazz concerts abroad with Monk.”⁹⁷ John Kruth describes Ware sitting in with Rahsaan Roland Kirk’s sextet in Oslo, Norway, in the early 1970s, performing a medley of “Night in Tunisia” and “Body and Soul.”⁹⁸ In 1977, Ware’s advancing emphysema had reached such a critical level that he was forced to completely stop performing.⁹⁹

On Sunday, the 9th of September 1979, one day after his 56th birthday, Wilbur Ware died of emphysema in Germantown, Pennsylvania. He had struggled with the disease for several years. He was survived by four sisters, his wife, two sons, and four

⁹⁴ Litweiler, “Remembering,” 82.

⁹⁵ John Curry, “Ware”; Ron Wynn, “Wilbur Ware (Wilbur Bernard Ware),” in *All Music Guide to Jazz*, ed. Ron Wynn (San Francisco: Miller Freeman Books, 1994), 655.

⁹⁶ Robert L. Campbell, liner notes to *Standards*, by Sun Ra (1201 Music 9019-2, 2000, compact disc).

⁹⁷ Babs Gonzales, *Moving On Down De Line* (Newark: Expubidence Publishing Corp., 1975), no page number.

⁹⁸ John Kruth, *Bright Moments: The Life & Legacy of Rahsaan Roland Kirk* (New York: Welcome Rain Publishers, 2000), 181.

⁹⁹ Litweiler, “Remembering,” 85.

grandchildren.¹⁰⁰ He was buried in Chicago in the week preceding September 22nd, and a memorial service was subsequently held in New York's St. Mark's United Methodist Church. Singer Evelyn Blakey, trumpeter Tommy Turrentine, tenor saxophonist Clifford Jordan, pianist Barry Harris, and bassist Bill Lee were among the musicians who performed.¹⁰¹

Almost twenty years later, on August 30, 1996, the Chicago Sun-Times ran a preview of a performance to be held that evening as part of the 18th Annual Chicago Jazz Fest:

6:55-7:45 p.m.: "The Chicago Sound' Revisited: A Tribute to Wilbur Ware." Ware, who died in 1979, was one of the greatest Chicago bass players, a percussive-minded original who backed such immortals as John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins and Thelonious Monk. "The Chicago Sound" is his memorable 1957 album, which will be sampled by a band including two of the other homegrown heroes featured on it: tenorist Johnny Griffin and drummer Wilbur Campbell. They'll be joined by altoist Bunky Green, pianist Junior Mance and bassist Victor Sproles, gifted former Chicagoans who can't revisit town too often.¹⁰²

Unfortunately, the set ended up being "criminally short," and only one tune from the actual album of almost forty years earlier was programmed as part of the set.¹⁰³ The fact that a tribute to Ware was even featured in such a program, however, attests to the musical legacy that Ware left behind. The actual compositions that Ware used as vehicles over his musical career are not as important as the approach he took to music

¹⁰⁰ "Wilbur Ware," *Variety*, 19 September 1979, 47.

¹⁰¹ Case.

¹⁰² Lloyd Sachs, "Let it be bop . . . ; and more at Chicago Jazz Fest," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 30 August 1996, Late Sports Final Edition, Weekend Plus, 48.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, "Sketches, Gillespie tribute put 18th fest over the top," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 1 September 1996, Late Sports Final Edition, Sunday News, Jazz Review, 44.

performance and his impact on both those who played with him and those who followed him. From his earliest days of playing in Reverend Turner's church through his years on the music scene in both Chicago and New York, Ware's dedication to his individualistic approach to the bass and his intimate connection to the intertwining network of performers wove him deeply into the musical fabric of his time.

Music is all I know and actually all I want to know.¹⁰⁴
—Wilbur Ware

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Case.

CHAPTER TWO

ROOTS

Part of Wilbur Ware's strength as a bassist and his ability to carve new paths for players of his instrument to follow as both an accompanist and a soloist comes from his strong sense of tradition and his intimate knowledge of the performers who preceded him. Ware himself said, "I came out of the mold of Blanton and Israel Crosby and a few others—Truck Parham, John Kirby, even Milt Hinton. They all gave me something with which to grow."¹⁰⁵ To this list, articles by Brian Case and Guy Kopel add Billy Taylor as another early influence.¹⁰⁶ Ware's choice of bass heroes is telling in a number of ways. Although Kirby worked as a bandleader from the late 1930s through the mid-1940s and Blanton is credited with advancing the role of the bass as a solo instrument, all the bassists Ware names are known chiefly as sidemen and more for their strong and creative accompaniments than for any solo pyrotechnics. In Blanton's case, Ware seemed more attracted by his sound and power than by his soloing ability (see below). Noticeably absent are players like Charles Mingus and Oscar Pettiford, who performed more often as leaders than as sidemen, and whose facility and solo work often led listeners to compare them to guitarists or cellists.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Goldsby, "Ware," 75.

¹⁰⁶ Case; Kopel, 17.

¹⁰⁷ Interestingly, Mingus started his musical life as a cellist and Pettiford developed a technique on solo cello when an arm broken playing baseball temporarily kept him off the bass.

Also of note is that three of the five bassists Ware names either came up in Chicago or established themselves as major figures while working in Ware's native city. An important center for bass players both before and after Ware's time, Chicago has always been full of noted bass players. Early bassists on the Chicago scene included John Lindsay (1894-1950) and Willie Dixon (1915-1992), neither of whom were native to the city, but both of whom made their name as players and spent their careers there. Pianist Andrew Hill, who worked in the 1950s with Ware role-model Crosby and with Ware partners Ammons, Freeman, and Griffin,¹⁰⁸ recalls working with Ware in a city full of bassists:

Yeah, Wilbur Ware, the great one! [laughs] I did a few things with Wilbur. I enjoyed him. But then, fortunately or unfortunately . . . there really wasn't any great ones, because then you had Israel Crosby in Chicago and all these incredible bassists.¹⁰⁹

What makes this so important is the underscoring of the sense of musical community that existed before Ware's arrival on the scene and for at least a generation after. Personal contact and interaction among individual players led to strong local scenes outside of the Mecca of New York City. Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles are some of the regional centers that produced groups of local musicians that would rise to national prominence over the course of the 20th century. Tradition and musical knowledge were handed down by the older players to the younger, and wisdom gained from practical experiences was passed on to succeeding generations. Rather

¹⁰⁸ David H. Rosenthal, *Hard Bop: Jazz & Black Music 1955-1965* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 160.

¹⁰⁹ Ted Panken, "Andrew Hill: Roots and Blue Notes, June 26, 1996, WCKR-FM, New York," <http://www.jazzhouse.org/library/>.

than citing players who he learned about from recordings or academic study, Ware recalls bassists with whom he either had personal contact or could see perform in live settings. This chapter examines Ware's connection to the bassists whose impact on his playing he acknowledges and delineates his musical relationship with the playing of earlier bassist Walter Page. It is this connection to an earlier, pre-bop lineage that grounds Ware's innovations in a strong sense of tradition.

Although Ware doesn't directly name him as a major influence, Ware's approach to the bass is clearly prefigured in the work of Walter Page (1900-1957). Ware does, however, cite Truck Parham, who figured as a personal link between Page and Ware (see below). Born in Gallatin, Missouri, Page rose to regional prominence with Bennie Moten's band (1918-1923 and 1931-1935) and his own Blue Devils (1925-1931). The Blue Devils were one of the biggest "territory bands" of the period, building a strong reputation locally by touring and performing throughout the Midwest. Page achieved national importance when, on the leader's death in 1935, the Moten band was transformed into the group led by Count Basie . Although a brief battle had occurred between Basie and Page over control of the new group, the bassist played under Basie from 1935-1942 and 1946-1949.¹¹⁰

Page's bass was the anchor of "The All-American Rhythm Section," which featured Basie on piano, Freddie Green on guitar, and Jo Jones on drums. The band's buoyant swing feel was anchored by Page's accompaniment, and his innovative

¹¹⁰ Scott Yanow, "Walter Page," <http://www.allmusic.com>; John Goldsby, "The Tradition: Walter Page," *Bass Player*, July/August 1993, 70.

walking bass lines were often featured in a soloistic fashion highlighted by Basie's sparse piano playing. Harry "Sweets" Edison recalls the effect:

That rhythm section would send chills up me every night. The whole band would be shouting, and then all of a sudden everybody would drop out for the bridge and there would be just the rhythm with Page's bass going up and down. Oh, my goodness!¹¹¹

This sound would be echoed years later in the performances of Ware with Thelonious Monk. Monk's fondness for "strolling" (not playing during horn solos, leaving the soloist with only the accompaniment of the drums and walking bass) often highlighted Ware's lines. There are also passages on Monk recordings where the pianist breaks into disjunct chordal exclamations, placing the musical flow and drive squarely on Ware's shoulders in a bop rewriting of the prototypical swing of Basie and Page's interaction. What makes the aural similarities even stronger is Monk's fondness for the older school of pianists ("I sound like James P. Johnson"¹¹²), hints of which repeatedly slip into his playing, and Ware's solid grounding in the bass approach of the earlier players. This similarity of approach, and Ware's incorporation of tradition into innovation, can be seen by comparing accompanimental sections by Page and Ware (see transcriptions in Appendix I).

¹¹¹ Quoted in Stanley Dance, *The World of Count Basie* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980), 104.

¹¹² Quoted in Orin Keepnews, liner notes to *Thelonious Himself*, by Thelonious Monk (Riverside OJCCD-254-2, 1992, compact disc).

On the studio recording of “Moten Swing” from August 8, 1940, Page’s bass line is prominently featured in the first full chorus of the performance.¹¹³ Count Basie’s sparse piano playing, the reserved time-keeping of drummer Jo Jones, and the almost inaudible acoustic guitar of Freddie Green leave plenty of room for Page’s walking line to shine through. For most of the chorus, Page’s line moves in a smooth, arch-like shape through the low and middle registers of the instrument. He uses a mixture of triadic arpeggios and scalar motion that is given variety by the use of larger intervals to switch registers (sixths in bars 8 and 9, a seventh in bar 12, octaves in bars 8 and 31, and a ninth in bar 15). Aside from the contrasting bridge section (bars 17 through 24), Page moves in steady quarter notes, providing a strong rhythmic grounding for the group as his lines surge up and down. On the bridge, Page suddenly switches to an ostinato figure based on the rhythm of an eighth note followed by a dotted quarter note. This syncopates the basic pulse of the bass line and provides a strong contrast to the steady beat of the preceding section, thus underlining the modulation from Eb to G major. The second and fourth note in each of the ostinato bridge measures is a D; Page is providing a pedal tone on the fifth degree of the G major scale while providing a moving line underneath it in eighth notes. This is a precursor to Ware’s own approach; Von Freeman described this conception by saying that Ware “played the bass like maybe he’s playing two basses, like he’s walking and he’s playing another line” (quoted in the first chapter).

¹¹³ Count Basie, *The Essential Count Basie Volume 3*, Columbia CK 44150, 1988, compact disc.

Ware's bass line on "Trinkle, Tinkle," recorded in July 1957, comes to the foreground during Monk's second solo chorus (drummer Shadow Wilson is the only other player during this section). Ware uses two of Page's concepts and combines them into a strikingly original statement. Page's use of the upper pedal point and simultaneous moving lines in the "Moten Swing" bridge is used by Ware throughout the chorus. In the most striking instance, Ware creates three parallel lines in the first two bars; the upper Bb in the first bar moves to an A in the second bar and an Ab in the third bar, the middle Eb remains constant for the first two bars, and the low Bb in the first bar moves to the low A of the second bar. Page's use of large intervals to change registers and add variety to the line is adopted and expanded upon by Ware throughout his chorus. Ware uses octaves repeatedly, and goes as far as skipping an eleventh upward in bar 6. His most intriguing use of large intervals comes in the form of octave displacement in the midst of stepwise lines to shift the linear emphasis away from expected placement within the metrical framework in a manner that combines Page's intervallic concept with an updating of his bridge syncopation. From bar 4 through bar 6, the line Eb-F-G-Ab-A-Bb-C-D starts not on a downbeat, but on beat three of the measure. Between the Ab and A, Ware suddenly drops an octave and continues his upward motion. The tonic Eb expected at the end of the line is replaced with the upward leap of the eleventh mentioned earlier to the G harmonic at the second partial. Ware makes use of this same sort of displacement in bars 13 and 29, the latter of which moves the G out of sequence by moving it up an octave to the harmonic before returning to the A and subsequently dropping yet another octave to the low Bb.

Interestingly, Ware uses a Page-like, mainly triadic language (often only using roots and fifths) within the complex harmonic world of Monk. Ware does not spell out upper chord extensions, but rather focuses on implying passing chords, as in the secondary dominant hinted at in the latter half of bar 17. Ware's walking lines are played with "an economy of note choices that gives a deceptively simple cast to his brilliance."¹¹⁴

Page developed an ability to create bass lines that did more than merely pump out harmonic roots or delineate form in some rudimentary fashion.

As far back as 1929, recordings document Page's wide-ranging, beautifully balanced bass lines beginning to function on three levels: rhythmic, harmonic, and now melodic. Such bass lines also provided a new contrapuntal element, not in the old New Orleans collective improvisation sense but as a more purely *linear* counterpart, heard with, under, and against the melodic elements in the middle or upper register.¹¹⁵

Page's emphasis was on accompaniment, and on strengthening the group cohesion of the ensemble through personal contribution. Gene Ramey, who studied with Page, recalls:

I didn't learn any technical things about playing the bass from him, but I learned from him how to construct, how to support a soloist, and how to work with a rhythm section. What he showed me most of all was restraint. I'd stand next to him, next to the door leading out to the alleyway, and he'd tell me things. 'There's a whole lot I could do here,' he'd say, 'but what you must do is play a straight line, because that man out there's waiting for food from you. You could run changes on every chord that's going on. You've got time to do it. But if you do, you're interfering with that guy. So run a straight line.'¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Blumenthal, 3.

¹¹⁵ Gunther Schuller, *The Swing Era: The Development of Jazz 1930-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 226.

¹¹⁶ Quoted in Dance, *Basie*, 264-265.

Echoing both of the previous passages, John Litweiler described Ware's approach to his instrument on the bassist's death in 1979:

Playful, sober, driving, contrasting, humorous many times, Ware avoided the faceless role that the vast majority of bassists have chosen. But he had the earthy wisdom to avoid the other extremes, the often Wagnerian stance of Mingus and also the virtuoso self-dramatics, so thoroughly denying the life-giving essence of jazz ensembles, that have become an entire fashionable genre in the '70s.¹¹⁷

Contemporary accounts of Page and Ware describe a similar strength and richness of sound in an era before electronic bass amplification had become commonplace. A large part of the power of Page's sound was due to the sheer physical size of the two-hundred-fifty pound bassist. His size and strength enabled him to perform regularly on an instrument with gut strings so high that modern, steel-string players would hurt themselves trying to play.¹¹⁸ Arranger Eddie Durham recalls,

Without amplification, a lot of guys weren't strong enough on bass fiddle. But Walter Page you could hear! He was like a house with a note.¹¹⁹

Paul Berliner quotes an unnamed drummer contemporary with Ware describing, in very similar terms, Ware's strength as it showed itself in the practice of using another player's bass when sitting in at a session.

Many musicians used to complain about that, and they'd blame the instruments when they didn't play in tune or made a puny sound. But when Wilbur Ware took over the instruments, no matter whose they

¹¹⁷ Litweiler, "Remembering," 85.

¹¹⁸ Jimmy Cheatham, in conversation, 1994.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Dance, *Basie*, 63.

were, those basses always played in tune, and they filled the whole room with sound. And that was without amplification.¹²⁰

British journalist Valerie Wilmer wrote of Ware's powerful sound in 1971:

“Long regarded as one of THE bassists, he has often been noted as the only performer on his unamplified instrument capable of stilling all conversation in a noisy club”¹²¹

Jimmy Blanton (1918-1942), the first player mentioned by Ware, initially played the violin, but moved to the bass while attending Tennessee State College. He did his first professional bass work in groups run by his pianist mother in Chattanooga and subsequently joined the Jeter-Pillars Orchestra and Fate Marable riverboat band in St. Louis, where he was asked by Duke Ellington to join his group in 1939; the bassist was only eighteen. With Ellington, he was featured in the large ensemble both as a member of the rhythm section and as a soloist, and he was given the spotlight on a series of duet recordings with Ellington that changed public perception of the capabilities of the bass as a solo instrument. He was also one of the players at the jam sessions at Minton's Playhouse in Harlem that gave birth to the bebop movement. He was diagnosed with congenital tuberculosis in 1941 and was checked into a sanatorium in California, dying there on July 30, 1942, at age 23.¹²²

¹²⁰ Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 260.

¹²¹ Wilmer, “Ware.”

¹²² Richard S. Ginell, “Jimmy Blanton,” <http://www.allmusic.com>; Todd Coolman, *The Bass Tradition* (New Albany, IN: Jamey Aebersold, 1985), 3.

Blanton built upon the developments of Walter Page, carving out a role for the bassist as soloist by “improvising like a ‘horn’ in moving eighth- or sixteenth-note passages, both bowed and pizzicato (plucked).”¹²³ His lines were a far cry from the steady four-four of Walter Page, and served as the starting-point for a new generation of bassists-as-soloists; his followers included Oscar Pettiford, Ray Brown, Paul Chambers, and (to some extent) Charles Mingus. The difference between Blanton and the majority of his predecessors was the rhythmic agility of his solo passages. The bassist “fragmented his lines with rests and employed dotted-eighth-and-16th-note figures. Although he was not the first bassist to use these last two devices, he employed them more often and with better effect than had preceding bassists.”¹²⁴ However, it is exactly this horn-like approach to the bass that separates Ware from the generation after Blanton and sets him apart even in his approach to the fundamental sound of his instrument; “Most bassists after Blanton concentrated on connecting all the notes of a walking line, but Ware utilized both long and short notes in his lines. He let the space between the notes influence the feel, adding variety—and lots of swing—to the rhythmic flow.”¹²⁵ Blanton worked on stretching the duration of his plucked notes, a quest that led to the wholesale adoption of steel strings by the bass community and eventually brought forth the growling low register of Ron Carter in the 1970s. Going against the general trend, “Wilbur often deliberately uses what bass players refer to as a

¹²³ Schuller, 110.

¹²⁴ Harvey Pekar, “The Development of Modern Bass,” *Down Beat*, 11 October 1962, 19.

¹²⁵ Goldsby, “Ware,” 75.

‘short sound,’ that is, he uses rests between consecutive notes of a phrase rather than trying for the legato, ‘long sound’ preferred by most jazz bassists. He uses the long sound when it will enhance his line, but isn’t all one-way about it.”¹²⁶

Given this idea of bass tone, Gunther Schuller’s conception of “the element of swing” puts Ware at something of a disadvantage. Using a computer to sonically analyze taped performances of the same excerpt by Ray Brown and Richard Sarpola, Schuller writes:

The rather dramatic differences between playing which swings and playing which doesn’t can be clearly seen in these graphic illustrations, most particularly in the difference in the decay patterns of the notes. Note, for example, the visibly long durations in Ray Brown’s walking bass line . . . , as compared with the much shorter and more quickly thinning out patterns produced by the non-swinging bass notes of Richard Sarpola Indeed, Brown’s notes almost link up with each other in a continuous musical line, while Sarpola’s notes show considerable interruptions between individual notes, clearly indicating a lack of line and a lack of swing.¹²⁷

This does seem a bit “all one-way about it,” and Schuller is not always so dogmatic (see below). A term as subjective as “swing” has led (and will no doubt continue to lead) to endless debates about who has the quality and who doesn’t. It can be strongly argued that a variant definition of swing intrinsically includes the utilization of space, or “interruptions between individual notes.” Visual artist Frank Stella has said that the aim of art “is to create space—space that is not compromised by decoration or illustration, space in which the subjects of painting can live. This is what painting has

¹²⁶ Bill Crow, “Introducing Wilbur Ware,” *Jazz Review*, December 1959, 15.

¹²⁷ Schuller, 855.

always been about.”¹²⁸ The parallel with music is clear when one conceptualizes musical performance as the creation of sound-events in a setting of pre-sound silence. In any case, the recorded documentation of Ware’s years of association with major figures in the music speaks louder than digital analysis of computer-converted pitch-envelope samples.

In an autobiographical article, Walter Page looked back on the first time he heard his own role model, Wellman Braud:

I was sitting right in the front row of the high school auditorium and all I could hear was the oomp, oomp, oomp of that bass, and I said, that’s for me. I was just getting started with Bennie Moten then, perfecting my beat. Braud is my daddy. That’s why I have the big beat. There were a lot of good bass players, but he had the power. There was a guy from New Orleans named Buck Stoll who had a little French bass, and he had lots of rhythm and tone, but no power. When Braud got ahold of that bass, he hit those notes like hammers and made them jump right out of that box.¹²⁹

Compare Page’s first impression of Braud to Ware’s first impression of Jimmy Blanton, who provided the catalyst for the young Ware to begin forming his own style.

For mastery, Blanton was *it*. He had tone, he didn’t need amplifiers, you could hear him over a 15 piece band. He made it sound so pretty.¹³⁰

Ware seems to have been influenced more by Blanton’s sound as an accompanist than by his facility in solo playing, an emphasis that he shares with Page. He does, however, recall that the first recording he heard with Blanton was his feature with the Ellington

¹²⁸ Quoted in exhibition notes to “Frank Stella: Recent Paintings & Sculpture,” Richard Gray Gallery, John Hancock Center, Chicago, 11 May-14 June, 2000.

¹²⁹ Walter Page as told to Frank Driggs, “About My Life in Music,” *Jazz Review*, November 1958, 12.

¹³⁰ Quoted in Litweiler, “Remembering,” 27.

large ensemble, “Jack the Bear,” saying, “I learned that solo right away!”¹³¹ He “developed the rhythmic aspects of Blanton’s style while other bassists focused on his melodic and harmonic innovations.”¹³² Harvey Pekar describes Blanton’s acoustic sound as follows: “No matter how involved his playing, his tone remained full and firm, and he projected a relaxed, good natured mood. He used space adroitly in the tension-release process and was probably the first bassist to swing in any but the crudest fashion.”¹³³ Although this seems unnecessarily harsh to the long line of bassists that preceded Blanton, it does support the idea that Blanton was known among his contemporaries as much for his volume of sound as for his soloing ability, and also encompasses a conception of swing that favors a varied use of space within a given line. Gunther Schuller concurs:

But it was not only in the expansion of the bass’s role that Blanton pioneered. It was the natural acoustical qualities of his pizzicato playing that also set new standards. His tone was astonishingly full, a bigness caused not by sheer amplitude but by purity of timbre and an uncanny ability to center each tone. No one had ever produced such a firm clean-edged sound, at once tensile and supple, powerful and graceful. Most importantly, he was the first to develop the long tone in pizzicato, thereby surmounting a long-standing limitation of pizzicato bass playing: the previously accepted notion that plucked notes can only be short and that variability of duration was unachievable.¹³⁴

Less doctrinaire than his other essaying on the concept of swing, this description of Blanton’s flexibility of duration is broad enough to encompass Ware’s conception;

¹³¹ Quoted in Orin Keepnews, liner notes to *The Chicago Sound*. Cook and Morton seem a bit extreme when they qualify Ware’s originality by saying that “much of what Ware did stemmed directly from Jimmy Blanton’s ‘Jack the Bear’” (Cook, 1332).

¹³² Goldsby, “Ware,” 71.

¹³³ Pekar, 19.

¹³⁴ Schuller, 111.

along the spectrum of various note-lengths, Ware chose to stay closer to the percussive, buoyant end than the smooth, legato end. Much in the way that Roswell Rudd took his powerful, New Orleans-style trombone style and used it in a freer, avant-garde context in the 1960s, Ware utilized the rhythmic approach of Blanton and applied it to the more modern, hard-bop music of the late 1950s.

The bass lines of Israel Crosby (1919-1962) were a major influence on Ware and have been compared to the basso continuo parts of Johann Sebastian Bach for their definitive choice of notes. George Shearing said that Crosby “played bass parts that were so beautiful, you could never write anything as good.” Crosby was born in Chicago and began in music on trumpet, trombone, and tuba and switched over to bass in 1934. In 1935, Gene Krupa’s “Blues for Israel” featured the 16-year-old Crosby performing one of the earliest recordings of a bass solo of any notable length. In 1936, he recorded with Roy Eldridge, with whom Ware worked a decade later. Crosby performed with Albert Ammons (1935-1936), Fletcher Henderson (1936-1938) (often performing at Chicago’s Grand Terrace Ballroom), Horace Henderson (Fletcher’s brother) (1940), and Teddy Wilson (1940-1942). He worked with Ahmad Jamal’s trio 1951-1953 and 1957-1962 and performed with Benny Goodman from 1953-1954 and again from 1955-1956. In 1962, he joined the George Shearing Quintet.¹³⁵ While on health leave from the Shearing group due to headaches and blurred vision, Crosby died

¹³⁵ Coolman, 28; Scott Yanow, “Israel Crosby,” <http://www.allmusic.com>; John Goldsby, “The Tradition: Israel Crosby,” *Bass Player*, November 1993, 72.

in Chicago's West Side Veteran's Administration Hospital from a blood clot in his heart on August 11, 1962.¹³⁶

Much as in the case of Blanton, Crosby seems to have influenced Ware as a strong and creative accompanist rather than as a soloist. Ware, who had a strong predilection for pedal tones, cited Crosby as the source of his conception of their use: "Israel might hit a B flat for maybe 16 bars [behind a Jamal solo], but that would be correct because he's playing the bottom of the chord: he can go anywhere in the world, but he's singing that beautiful note. I do things like that, according to how the music is and how I relate to the cats I'm working with."¹³⁷ Ware's strong sense of providing a rhythmically and harmonically interesting accompaniment while still generating a strong sense of form and momentum, although perhaps having its earliest roots in the conceptions of Walter Page, gets much of its depth from expanding upon Crosby's ideas. Writing of a 1941 recording of Crosby with clarinetist Edmond Hall and his Celeste Quartet, Gunther Schuller describes the bassist's playing as "functioning at once as harmonic foundation *and* 'rhythm section,' at the same time weaving fine contrapuntal/melodic lines, especially in his continually reiterated triplet figures."¹³⁸ In 1961, LeRoi Jones wrote of Wilbur Ware in relation to the changing role of the bass in the new, freer music of the time.

Because rhythm and melody complement each other so closely in the "new" music, both bass player and drummer also can play "melodically." They need no longer to be strictly concerned with

¹³⁶ "Tragic End to a Two Week Leave," *Down Beat*, 27 September 1962, 13.

¹³⁷ Quoted in Litweiler, "Remembering," 27.

¹³⁸ Schuller, 571.

thumping along, merely carrying the beat. The melody itself contains enough rhythmic accent to propel and stabilize the horizontal movement of the music, giving both direction and impetus. The rhythm instruments can then serve to elaborate on the melody itself. Wilbur Ware's playing is a perfect example of this.¹³⁹

This description could just as easily fit Crosby's accompaniment in his recording of "But Not for Me" with the Ahmad Jamal trio in 1958, in which he manages to weave antiphonal countermelodies while providing a solid harmonic and rhythmic support for the group.¹⁴⁰

In yet another case of the bass lineage that evolved in Chicago, Milt Hinton is credited with discovering and encouraging the young Israel Crosby.¹⁴¹ Ware subsequently met Crosby, "his primary stylistic influence," in 1946.¹⁴² Ware said he "got lots of ideas" from Crosby¹⁴³ and later summed up the quality he found most appealing in Crosby's playing:

Israel had such a beautiful sense of timing. He was the most relaxed bassist I've ever seen. He'd hit a note, nonchalant. If you can't relax playin', you're not really playin' it like it should be played.¹⁴⁴

Another influence on Ware, Charles Valdez "Truck" Parham (1911-2002) was a Chicago native who started working in 1928 as a tuba player and became known as a bassist who played in many different musical settings, without regard for stylistic boundaries. He worked briefly as a boxer and a professional football player in an all-

¹³⁹ Jones, 76.

¹⁴⁰ Ahmad Jamal, *At the Pershing: But Not for Me*, MCA-Chess CHD-9108, 1983, compact disc.

¹⁴¹ Coolman, 10.

¹⁴² Litweiler, "Remembering," 27.

¹⁴³ Quoted in Orin Keepnews, liner notes to *Chicago Sound*.

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Litweiler, "Remembering," 27.

black football league (with the Chicago Negro All-Stars) before deciding on a full-time career in music, first as a drummer. From 1932 to 1934, he worked with the Zack Whyte band in and around Cincinnati as a singer and valet, earning his nickname by helping the musicians transport their instruments. Parham was one of the first to make the switch from tuba to string bass as the horn faded from use in bands of the 1930s. Walter Page was then living in Cincinnati, and Parham traded duty as Page's bodyguard for bass lessons. Parham returned to Chicago in 1935 and studied with Nate Gangursky, one of the bassists in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. In Chicago, he worked from 1936 to 1938 as a sideman in bands led by Zutty Singleton, Art Tatum, and Roy Eldridge (with whom Ware worked in 1946 Milwaukee). He became an in-demand player in Chicago for "[h]is powerful and buoyant bass lines—and his ability to meet the harmonic challenge of accompanying virtuosos like Tatum and Eldridge." In 1940, he had a short tenure with Bob Shoffner's Big Band before gaining national attention when Chicago pianist Earl Hines hired him, and the bassist made recordings with his band including the hit "Jelly Jelly" with vocalist Billy Eckstine. After Parham had been working with Hines for two years, Jimmie Lunceford hired the bass player for his big band. Parham toured and recorded with the group until Lunceford died in 1947. Back home again in Chicago, Parham worked with trad cornetist Muggsy Spanier from 1950-1955, swing saxophonist Herbie Fields from 1956-1957, also performing with swing drummer Louis Bellson and bebop saxophonist Gigi Gryce. Parham subsequently moved back to Chicago and lived there until his death. From 1957, when he began working with Chicago pianist Art Hodes, until health issues forced a

retirement a few years before his death at age 91, Parham was active playing on the Chicago music scene and performed at festivals around the world.¹⁴⁵

Parham's main importance to Ware is in the concrete link he provides between Ware and Walter Page. After studying with Page, Parham was located in Chicago both during Ware's earliest years on the bass and during his Chicago heyday in the early to mid-1950s. In addition, it is worth noting that both Parham and Ware worked with Roy Eldridge (as did Crosby), who, as a player solidly in the swing style, sits at the stylistic halfway point between the trad musicians Parham gained his greatest notoriety with and the bop moderns with whom Ware made his most lasting contributions. Both bassists were also noted for being able to perform strongly in the challenging harmonic contexts provided by musicians like Parham's Tatum, Ware's Monk, and the Eldridge that both worked with.

John Kirby (1908-1952) was born on New Year's Eve in Baltimore. He studied the trombone, but started his career as a tuba player. He began focusing on the bass on joining the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra in 1930, although he continued to play both tuba and bass as late as 1934.¹⁴⁶ He worked with Henderson 1930-1933 and 1935-1936 (succeeded by Israel Crosby in 1937) and Chick Webb 1933-1935; Webb's group at the time was the house band at Harlem's Savoy Ballroom. Kirby led his own group at the Onyx Club starting in 1937; this group became known as the John Kirby Sextet (billed

¹⁴⁵ Peter Keepnews, "Truck Parham, 91, Jazz Bassist for 7 Decades, Dies," *The New York Times*, 23 June 2002, 29; Scott Yanow, "Truck Parham," <http://www.allmusic.com>.

¹⁴⁶ Schuller, 295.

by Kirby as “The Biggest Little Band in the Land”) and achieved great popularity between 1938 and 1942, having its greatest hit with trumpeter Charlie Shaver’s “Undecided.” Always maintaining a dignified and sophisticated sound and appearance (foreshadowing the approach of the Modern Jazz Quartet), the sextet was able to break social barriers, among which was the distinction of being the first African-American jazz group to play at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. In late 1938, Kirby began working with the Benny Goodman Quartet, which at that point became the Goodman Quintet.¹⁴⁷ In 1946, after many shifts in personnel (including that year’s addition of Sarah Vaughan as vocalist), the Kirby Sextet broke up. Kirby made various attempts at creating a new sextet, including a 1950 reunion of the original lineup in Carnegie Hall, but the group’s real moment was at the height of the Swing Era. Kirby died from diabetes complications in California on June 14, 1952.¹⁴⁸

Like the other bassists cited by Ware, Kirby’s strong point as a player was as an accompanist. Although Kirby was nominally the leader of his group (and the driving philosophical force), the stars were the horn players and vocalists. Kirby provided a solid background support, and it was probably this strength in the context of both his own groups and working in the popular groups of Henderson, Webb, and Goodman that was most attractive to Ware.

¹⁴⁷ Schuller, 509.

¹⁴⁸ Unless noted otherwise, all from Scott Yanow, “John Kirby,” <http://www.allmusic.com>; John Goldsby, “The Tradition: John Kirby,” *Bass Player*, April 1993, 72.

Milton John Hinton (1910-2000) was born in Vicksburg, Mississippi, but moved to Chicago in 1918, where he studied violin, cello, baritone saxophone, and tuba before moving on to the bass. He studied classical bass privately and became one of Chicago's top bassists while playing with Freddie Keppard, Jabbo Smith, Tiny Parham, Fate Marable, Zutty Singleton, Eddie South, and Art Tatum. He was playing at the Three Deuces in 1935 when Cab Calloway hired him for what turned out to be a fifteen-year tenure with his big band (including during Dizzy Gillespie's time with the bandleader). In 1951, Hinton played with Count Basie and Louis Armstrong and moved to New York, eventually becoming a staff musician at CBS (in 1954) and playing on innumerable recording sessions for artists in various styles of music. From the 1970s on, Hinton toured, taught college courses, and worked as a leader.¹⁴⁹

During Gillespie's 1939-1941 tenure with Calloway, while he was working out the new music that would become known as bebop, the trumpeter reports that he

used to practice all the time with Milt Hinton. I used to teach Milton Hinton solos with all those chords I was working on. . . . I used to practice with him, we used to get it. Yeah, man. We used to go on the roof of the Cotton Club between shows and get it on. Nobody else was interested in anything like that. Most of the band was just sitting there making that money.¹⁵⁰

Hinton's eagerness to learn new styles and his flexibility as a bassist kept him in demand as a player. His willingness to work out a bass role amidst the harmonic

¹⁴⁹ Chris Jisi and Richard Johnston, "Milt Hinton 1910-2000: Big Sound, Big Heart: Remembering a Life in Jazz," *Bass Player*, March 2001, 56-58; Scott Yanow, "Milt Hinton," <http://www.allmusic.com>.

¹⁵⁰ Dizzy Gillespie with Al Fraser, *To Be, Or Not . . . to Bop* (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1979), 110.

advances of the bebop era while maintaining a strong sound developed during the height of the big band era would obviously have been of interest to Ware. The fact that Hinton was still taking slapped bass solos in the 1990s also shows a tendency to blend older and newer styles, as did Ware, whom David H. Rosenthal called “at once old-timey and avant-garde.”¹⁵¹ Hinton and Ware also shared in common a strong presence in New York’s studio scene. However, Hinton branched out into both commercial and orchestral recording, while Ware maintained a consistent focus on instrumental, small group jazz music.

Billy Taylor, Sr. (1906-1986), a native of Fairfax, Virginia, was the bassist for Duke Ellington’s Orchestra immediately before Jimmy Blanton. Taylor’s career began on the tuba but had, by the 1930s, moved over to bass. After moving to New York in 1924, he worked with Elmer Snowden (1925), Charlie Johnson’s Paradise Ten (1927-1929 and 1932-1933), McKinney’s Cotton Pickers (1931-1932), Fletcher Henderson’s Orchestra (1934), and Ellington (1935-1940). Originally part of a two-bass team in the Ellington band with Wellman Braud, Taylor was solo bass aside from a time when Hayes Alvis played second. Jimmy Blanton filled the second chair in 1939, after which Taylor voluntarily left the band to make room for the young virtuoso. After leaving Ellington, Taylor worked with Coleman Hawkins, Red Allen, Joe Sullivan (1942), Cootie Williams (1944), Barney Bigard, Benny Morton, and Cozy Cole, in addition to working in the studios at CBS and NBC. He then freelanced and eventually moved to

¹⁵¹ Rosenthal, 128.

Washington, DC and was still playing in the 1970s.¹⁵² The extent of Taylor's influence on Ware is hard to determine, as the older player is today known to bassists mostly as being the Ellington bassist before Blanton and after Braud, both of whom were greatly influential players in the history of the bass in the 20th century. Perhaps the citations of Taylor as an influence on the young Ware in Case and Kopel merely stem from Ware's recollection in 1957 that he had been impressed by Taylor's playing on the Ellington recording of "Harmony in Harlem" from 1937.¹⁵³

As evidenced by his musical relationship with these influences, Ware's innovative playing style did not develop in isolation, but evolved through participation in a vibrant musical community centered mainly in Chicago and New York. Ware's strengths as a performer and ability to innovate is strongly grounded in a knowledge of the bass tradition that preceded him. He creatively fused the work of these earlier players with his new conceptions to create a unique style that proceeded from the rhythmic, melodic, and conceptual approaches of his predecessors.

¹⁵² Scott Yanow, "Billy Taylor, Sr.," <http://www.allmusic.com>.

¹⁵³ Orin Keepnews, liner notes to *Chicago Sound*.

CHAPTER THREE

CONTEMPORARIES

The great divergence from contemporary notions of bass performance style that Ware represents is highlighted by examining the contributions of three of his colleagues. Paul Chambers, Scott LaFaro, and Art Davis were all born within a two-year period a decade after Ware, yet all four came to national attention at roughly the same time in the late 1950s. While each of the three younger players performs in a style noticeably different from one another, they all three have in common a tendency towards virtuosity and fluidity of technique. This virtuosic trend is usually cited as a logical outgrowth of evolution in performance standards within mainstream bass playing and did indeed become the dominant bass style over the next decades. Ware, however, bucked the trend and developed a personal style that focused more on the acoustic strengths of the instrument and a reverence for its low-end power.

Although several bassists before Blanton had extreme digital facility on the instrument, the Ellington bass player is generally accepted as the root of the technical movement. Leroy Elliot “Slam” Stewart (1914-1987), for example, had an arco solo technique that recorded evidence shows was far in advance of that used by the younger Blanton. What gives Blanton the preeminent position is his citation not merely by scholars and critics, but by the generations of bassists who regularly acknowledged their debt to his playing. Blanton’s focus on a phrasing derived from saxophone and trumpet players separates him from earlier bassists; it is noteworthy that almost every

preceding player started on the tuba, while Blanton started on the violin. The horn-like approach of the members of the Blanton school led, in some instances, to a reverse appropriation of their solo material by horn players; tenor saxophonist Scott Hamilton says that he lifted material from Oscar Pettiford bass solos to use in his own playing.¹⁵⁴

Paul Laurence Dunbar Chambers, Jr. (1935-1969) was born in Pittsburgh and raised in Detroit. He began on the baritone horn and tuba and picked up the bass at age 14. He was one of the many young players on the important local jazz scene of the time and worked with musicians including Thad Jones and Barry Harris. In 1952, Chambers began studying classical bass with a member of the Detroit Symphony bass section; this led to playing experience with the Detroit String Band and the Cass Tech Orchestra. Chambers also studied the baritone saxophone and a variety of other instruments during these years. He toured with Paul Quinichette and then moved to New York in 1954, where he worked with the J. J. Johnson/Kai Winding Quintet and George Wallington. He was a member of the Miles Davis Quintet for the period that produced a catalog of classic recordings between 1955 and 1962; the group initially included drummer Philly Joe Jones, with whom Ware would record repeatedly in the late 1950s. Chambers also recorded several records with Ware's partner from the Five Spot, John Coltrane, including 1959's *Giant Steps*. After leaving Davis' group, Chambers worked with the Wynton Kelly Trio (1963-1966) and played as a freelance

¹⁵⁴ Jim Merod, "Wait for the Chord: An Interview with Scott Hamilton," *Boundary 2*, Summer 1995, 213.

musician until his death on January 4, 1969, from tuberculosis aggravated by addiction to heroin and alcohol.¹⁵⁵

Chambers' playing, although definitely within a bop idiom, owes a great deal to Blanton both in terms of sound and concept. Like Blanton and Raymond Matthew "Ray" Brown (1926-2002), whose playing marks a halfway point between Blanton and Chambers, Chambers favors the long and connected way of sounding his notes, and plays with a rounded, mellow tone that is in stark contrast to the percussive strength of Ware's playing. Also following in Blanton's footsteps, Chambers recorded a great number of arco solos which are (again like the work of Blanton) recurrently plagued by sound production issues; this problem would not be seriously addressed until the advent of crossover classical/jazz performers like Art and Richard Davis (no relation). While Ware, on rare occasions, would use the bow for accompanimental passages, no recorded arco solos have surfaced as of this writing. Chambers' concept shares with Blanton's an affinity for complex, horn-like passages that are not necessarily idiomatic to the bass. Ware, on the other hand, regularly utilized melodic ideas that played to the acoustic properties of his instrument. In his 1962 *Down Beat* article on the evolution of the bass, Harvey Pekar described this difference in approach.

Diametrically opposed to the hornlike styles of [Red] Mitchell and Chambers is Wilbur Ware's conception. Ware plays like a drummer. His solo on *Trinkle Tinkle* with Thelonious Monk is more an ingenious juxtaposition of rhythmic figures than a series of melodic lines. He often uses doublestops and has a heavy stroke. In soloing he doesn't go beyond the basic trend or use eighth and 16th notes to the extent of most

¹⁵⁵ Scott Yanow, "Paul Chambers," <http://www.allmusic.com>; Coolman, 36; John Goldsby, "The Tradition: Paul Chambers," *Bass Player*, October 1992, 75.

modern bassists, and in his solos on *Epistrophy* and *Well, You Needn't* (Riverside 12-242) there are stretches in his solos where he is content to walk.¹⁵⁶

In December, 1959, Guy Kopel wrote an article in the French *Jazz Magazine* on Ware and LaFaro. Pekar argued that there was a tradition that stretched from Blanton in 1940 to Paul Chambers in 1955 and that included Oscar Pettiford, Slam Stewart, and Ray Brown (Stewart had actually been playing and recording before Blanton hit the scene).

Wilbur Ware n'est pas un révolutionnaire mais il a apporté une sonorité nouvelle et surtout une conception personnelle du solo. Les bassistes modernes se fourvoient dans de longues et laborieuses dissertations qui tiennent lieu de solos. Ils tentent d'obtenir un phrasé comparable à celui d'un ténor et, par le fait même qu'ils doivent détacher chacune de leurs notes, ils se trouvent dans l'impossibilité matérielle de créer une ligne suivie. Wilbur Ware a contourné le problème. Ses solos consistent en d'innombrables variations autour d'une note jouée sur des registres différents. Ou encore (comme dans le *Woodyn' You* de Johnny Griffin sur Riverside) après avoir fidèlement suivi le *tempo*—une note par temps—il double subitement la cadence. Ware obtient sur son instrument une sonorité à la fois feutrée et vibrante. Toutes les cordes de sa contrebasse semblent animées d'une même pulsation.¹⁵⁷

Bassist Bill Crow delineated the differences between Ware and the Blanton/Chambers school in 1959.

I don't mean that [Ware] has invented anything new in the way of lines, forms, or sound, but he has chosen an approach to these elements that does not follow the general evolution of bass style from Blanton through Pettiford, Brown, Heath, Chambers, Mingus, etc. Wilbur uses the same tools that other bassists use, but his concentration is more on percussion, syncopation and bare harmonic roots than on the achievement of a wind-instrument quality in phrasing and melodic invention. His solos are extremely melodic in their own way, logically developed and well

¹⁵⁶ Pekar, 20.

¹⁵⁷ Kopel, 16-17.

balanced, but they are permutations of the primary triad or reshuffling of the root line rather than melodies built from higher notes in the chord.¹⁵⁸

All of these elements can be seen in a comparison of solos by Chambers and Ware on “Softly as in a Morning Sunrise,” recorded within six months of each other in 1957 (see transcriptions in Appendix I).¹⁵⁹

Paul Chambers’ solo, recorded on May 19, exemplifies his Blanton-derived, horn-like approach.¹⁶⁰ Accompanied by pianist Tommy Flanagan and drummer Elvin Jones, Chambers spins out a chorus that could just as easily have been conceived by a saxophonist or soloist on any other instrument. The solo moves almost continuously in eighth notes phrased with rests that seem almost like the breaths taken by a wind-player. The solo is melodically inventive, making great use of Chambers trademark chromaticism to connect or surround the notes in his intricate runs; the Fb in bar 12 and the Abb in bar 21 are particularly noticeable. Chambers’ solo is not particularly structured; although the opening eight bars build in terms of phrase length, once the bassist gets into the eighth-note runs starting in bar 12, he takes off for the remainder of the chorus. The catchy, blues-like phrase in bars 9 through 11, in particular, seems like something Ware would have used and varied for a longer stretch of time. Chambers often starts his phrases on leading tones or lower neighbors to chord tones, usually on an upbeat. Chambers’ running lines do not sound particularly full-bodied. The preponderance of small note values and chromatic motion on a low-pitched instrument

¹⁵⁸ Crow, 14.

¹⁵⁹ John H. Curry’s transcription of Ware’s solo, while useful as a point of reference, contains a number of pitches and rhythms that I do not agree with.

¹⁶⁰ Paul Chambers, *Paul Chambers Quintet*, Blue Note 52441, 1996, compact disc.

do not take full advantage of the sonorous aspects of the instrument, especially in pizzicato play.

Ware's solo, recorded during the Rollins date at the Vanguard on November 3, is accompanied by Elvin Jones, the same drummer as on the Chambers recording. Ware himself almost sounds like a drummer as he shifts motivic rhythms and accents within the metrical structure rather than playing the running, horn-like lines favored by Chambers. Ware takes advantage of the fact that the bassist does not have to necessarily breathe between phrases; his lines tend to be longer than Chambers, yet are kept from sounding like they merely run on by Ware's use of short rests and variation in note duration to break up his phrases. He begins with a rhythmicized version of the melody, repeats this rhythmic pattern, then varies it the third time by playing, in effect, a series of quarter notes shifted one eighth note to the left. He uses a similar concept of motivic repetition in bars 9 through 12 and 25 through 28 to create a structured solo that strongly outlines form while greatly varying the placement of stress from measure to measure. Ware's fondness for beat-anticipation creates a sense of forward momentum and drive that is lacking in the essentially static rhythm of Chambers' solo. The harmonic interest of Ware's line does not lie in the creation of involved chromaticism as in the work of Chambers, but rather, as in his line to "Well, You Needn't" (discussed in the following chapter), through implying unusual chord progressions that rearrange fragments of the circle of fifths, as in the G-C, E-A, D-G, B-E of bar 23. In contrast to Chambers, Ware usually starts his phrases on roots or fifths and emphasizes downbeats; this could be due to the absence of the piano, which

Chambers has to help him outline the harmonic form while Ware must go it alone. Ware's sound gives a greater impression of volume than does Chambers'; this is largely due to Ware's use of longer note values (quarter notes both on and off the beat) and larger intervals. His positioning of notes in space takes advantage of, rather than fights against, the properties of the bass as a large, low-pitched instrument.

Another approach to the bass was taken by Rocco Scott LaFaro (1936-1961), who was born in Newark, New Jersey but grew up in Geneva, New York (between Rochester and Syracuse). He played clarinet and tenor saxophone, the latter of which he performed on while working around Geneva, and switched to the bass the summer after graduating from high school in 1954 and before spending a year at Ithaca Conservatory majoring in classical clarinet and minoring on bass. In 1955, he dropped out of school to concentrate on the bass and work in jazz and R&B groups in Syracuse and Rochester. His first name-band work was with Buddy Morrow's Orchestra (Fall 1955-Fall 1956) and Chet Baker (1956-1957). Stranded in Los Angeles after moving there for a Baker gig that only ended up lasting for a few weeks, LaFaro practiced incessantly. He then took a working trip to Chicago that also lasted a few weeks starting in December 1957 with Pat Moran and Ira Sullivan (Ware's Chicago partner in the 1956 Jazz Messengers). LaFaro subsequently returned to Los Angeles, where he sometimes played at the Lighthouse in Hermosa Beach (run by bassist Howard Rumsey) and worked with Barney Kessel, Victor Feldman, Cal Tjader, and Buddy DeFranco (with whom Ware worked in 1957). In 1958, LaFaro moved between San Francisco and Los Angeles, working with Ware's Village Vanguard partner Sonny

Rollins, playing in Stan Kenton's big band and beginning an association with Stan Getz that lasted until the bassist's death. In 1959, LaFaro moved to New York and joined the Bill Evans Trio. They recorded their classic live sets at the Village Vanguard in 1961, playing in what Evans called a "conversational" style; LaFaro played freely contrapuntal lines in a wide variety of note values and utilizing an enormous range (as opposed to laying down a continuous walking bass). LaFaro worked with Ornette Coleman, including playing on *The Art of the Improvisers* and *Ornette!* of 1961 and the landmark *Free Jazz* of 1960. Despite being an integral part of these major documentations of Coleman's evolving music, LaFaro's quest for technical perfection obviously caused some friction with the leader, who later said of the bassist, "He felt superior not only to Negroes but to whites as well."¹⁶¹ LaFaro died in a car crash on July 4, 1961 at age 25, ten days after the Evans Vanguard session and the next day after performing with Stan Getz at the Newport Jazz Festival.¹⁶²

LaFaro favored the upper register and used a two-finger technique that enabled him to play extremely fast runs. The use of two alternating fingers of the right hand had been used by isolated bassists as far back as Joe Shulman, whose first recordings were with Glen Miller in the 1940s; bassist George Duvivier recalls that Shulman was

¹⁶¹ Quoted in John Litweiler, *Ornette Coleman: The Harmolodic Life* (London: Quartet Books, 1992), 81-82.

¹⁶² Scott Yanow, "Scott LaFaro," <http://www.allmusic.com>; John Goldsby, "The Tradition: Scott LaFaro," *Bass Player*, July/Aug 1992, 72-73; Coolman, 50; Nat Hentoff, liner notes to *The Arrival of Victor Feldman*, by Victor Feldman (Contemporary OJCCD-268-2, 1998, compact disc); John Bany, "The Legendary Scott LaFaro," *International Society of Bassists*, Spring 1988, 38-49.

“the first bass player [he] ever saw practicing scales using two fingers.”¹⁶³ LaFaro, however, turned heads by developing the technique to a greater extent than any previous player and using it as a fundamental component of his playing. Bassist Jim Atlas recalls working with the Eddie Higgins Trio in The Cloister (in the basement of Chicago’s Maryland Hotel) on the same bill that featured LaFaro with Pat Moran and vocalist Beverly Kelly in December 1957: “Scotty showed me how to use the ‘two-finger’ technique. After that, playing extremely up-tempo tunes was a lot easier.”¹⁶⁴

Although members of the LaFaro school have embraced a light touch that is enhanced by electronic amplification, contemporary reports state that LaFaro’s sound was so powerful that both Sonny Rollins and Buddy DeFranco had trouble hearing themselves while playing with the young bassist.¹⁶⁵ However, by the time of LaFaro’s move to New York, both Red Mitchell and Paul Motian report that people were having a hard time hearing the young bassist. Benny Goodman replaced LaFaro with his mentor, Mitchell, when he had trouble hearing him in the group.¹⁶⁶ The heavy sound preserved on early recordings like those with Victor Feldman and Hampton Hawes has, by the time of LaFaro’s association with Evans, given way to a much lighter touch, and it is this period of the bassist’s career that has been isolated and focused on by succeeding generations of light-but-fleet players. Chuck Israels, who took LaFaro’s bass spot in the Evans group, spoke of the later bass players when he said, “People have

¹⁶³ Quoted in Edward Berger, *Bassically Speaking: An Oral History of George Duvivier* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1993), 110.

¹⁶⁴ Quoted in Bany, 39.

¹⁶⁵ Kopel, 17.

¹⁶⁶ Bany, 40, 43.

misused Scotty by saying, ‘Oh my God, it’s possible to play fast,’ and then they play fast but the content is missing.”¹⁶⁷ Ware had a similar view of the later generations and their relationship to both the musical past and creativity itself, as he reflected in 1971:

The kids I’ve seen in the last two decades—I’ll say the war-babies—they didn’t have to work for anything, they didn’t have to get out there and hustle like I did. I came up hustling which gave me a better insight on music because I was playing what I was living—I could create.

The kids nowadays—or should I say those in the last 20 years—they haven’t been able to create; they have to play with somebody else and get some of their stuff. If you notice, a whole lot of kids came up in the late ’forties and ’fifties aping the so-called giants.

.....

Kids don’t want to sit down and listen or study. They want to learn to play overnight and most of them have no conception of music.

Pat Patrick made a statement to Monk about this one night and Monk turned to him and said “They’ve taken the beauty out of music,” and it seems everybody’s going that way. I had to remember what Monk said because he summed it up, the way it really is.

I’ve got the feeling AND I can hear it. But those guys who can read snakes, ants and flies—you know what I mean?—they couldn’t hit a note true to save their souls! They’re really tone-deaf.¹⁶⁸

Despite the commonly accepted notion today that LaFaro’s sound and technique were dependent on the use of light steel strings, John Bany, Mel Lewis, and Charlie Haden all report that he used gut strings throughout his career. In 1986, Haden reflected on LaFaro’s setup:

Scotty never liked pickups . . . he wanted a real wood sound. Sometimes he would use a microphone wrapped in a towel wedged between the tailpiece and belly of the instrument, not in the bridge. I’m sure he used gut strings and later on the Golden Spirals [nickel or nylon-wrapped strings with a gut core]. Young players today should check this out.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Quoted in Bany, 49.

¹⁶⁸ Wilmer, “Ware.”

¹⁶⁹ Quoted in Bany, 40.

However, the later players coupled a very light playing style with steel strings and extreme amplification to create a technique that can be argued to have its strongest proponent in John Francis “Jaco” Pastorius (1951-1987), who, paradoxically, performed on a defretted electric bass guitar. The general perception of what constituted a good bass tone had become so identified with the fleet, amplified style that Pastorius was hailed at the time as making the electric sound like its acoustic counterpart (by that time itself electric). Not surprisingly, Ware was not fond of any aspect of this trend, saying in 1971, “And I don’t go for the Fender bass, either, I don’t go for the sound, don’t like that much electricity. I feel that if you’re going to play it, you’ve got to be a good guitarist first.”¹⁷⁰

A third variation of the virtuosic approach was utilized by Arthur D. Davis (b. 1934), who was born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and began his musical career on piano and tuba, even winning a national competition on the latter. He came to the bass in 1951, and before he had graduated from high school, he won a position in the Harrisburg Symphony and became the first African-American to be a member of that orchestra. He won scholarships to the Manhattan School of Music and Juilliard (studying with Anselme Fortier), but was blocked from symphony work because of his color. He returned to Harrisburg, led a jazz group, and worked as a sideman with visiting musicians Sonny Stitt and Kenny Dorham (who later performed and recorded with Ware). Davis visited Philadelphia on weekends to see jazz shows and was picked

¹⁷⁰ Wilmer, “Ware.”

out of the audience by Kenny Dorham to sit in for a missing bassist in the group he was performing in, led by drummer Max Roach; this happenstance led to work for Davis with Roach's group in 1958 and 1959. In 1959 and 1960, he toured Europe with Dizzy Gillespie, and in 1961 and 1965 he performed and recorded with Ware's Monk Quartet partner John Coltrane. He also worked with Gigi Gryce, Lena Horne, Booker Little, Quincy Jones, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Oliver Nelson, Freddie Hubbard, Clark Terry, and Ware collaborator Art Blakey. Davis' extensive orchestra work includes Arturo Toscanini's Symphony of the Air, the National Symphony, the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, and the New York Philharmonic; between 1962 and 1970, Davis worked with the television orchestras of CBS, NBC, and Westinghouse. Davis and trumpeter Clark Terry were the first African-Americans to be hired by the NBC studio orchestra. Davis has advanced degrees in music and psychology and continues to work as both a music professor and practicing psychologist. He is the author of 1975's *The Arthur Davis Method for Double Bass*.¹⁷¹

While Ware lists as his influences older bassists, mainly of the Chicago school, Davis says his approach to the bass is rooted more in the playing of saxophonists Coleman Hawkins, Charlie Parker, and John Coltrane than to his main bass influence, Oscar Pettiford.¹⁷² Pettiford, of course, was one of the first bassists to develop the soloistic concept of Blanton. Davis also cites drummer Max Roach as an inspiration;

¹⁷¹ Ron Wynn, "Art Davis," <http://www.allmusic.com>; Richard Johnston, "Bridging the Gap between Jazz & the Classics: A Private Lesson with Art Davis," *Bass Player*, October 1992, 51-54.

¹⁷² Johnston, 51.

specifically, Roach's implied rather than stated beat.¹⁷³ He speaks disdainfully of his contemporaries in the 1950s, saying, "I thought, when I was starting out, that the bass had too many constrictions about it, that it seemed to be in the Dark Ages. Even when bass players soloed, they had that same concept, as if they were backing someone."¹⁷⁴

Davis' difference in playing concept from Ware includes his physical approach to the instrument. Possibly the first bassist in jazz to make the switch to steel strings, Davis uses Pirastro Flexocore strings, the model advertised by their manufacturer as being specifically designed for classical orchestral playing. Davis holds his bass in front of his body like a cello and plays with a four-finger left-hand technique even in the lowest register; one of his teachers was Laslo Varga, principal cellist of the New York Philharmonic.¹⁷⁵ In contrast, Ware's use of gut strings is integral to his full yet percussive sound, and his posture is traditional standing.

Davis' emphasis on virtuoso playing derived from a strong classical technique definitely brought him some notice. Eric Dolphy later recalled that Davis outshone Ware on the night that Ware sat in with Coltrane's two-bass rhythm section at the Village Gate in the early 1960s, saying,

John and I got off the stand and listened and Art Davis was really playing some kind of bass. Mingus has some "know-how" of bass that he won't tell anyone, but Art sure does have some "know-how" of bass like Mingus.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Ibid., 52.

¹⁷⁴ Quoted in Johnston, 51.

¹⁷⁵ Johnston, 51.

¹⁷⁶ Quoted in Wilmer, "Conversation," 2. This passage continues directly from the Dolphy quote at footnote 72.

This bridging of classical and jazz technique, like LaFaro's digital dexterity, found a resonance in the musical approach of many bass players who rose to prominence in the succeeding years. Richard Davis, David Izenzon, and Barry Guy are among the bassists who rose to prominence in the 1960s on the strength of their blend of advanced jazz and modern classical playing.

The three forms taken by the tendency to technical virtuosity—the horn-like approach, the light fleetness, and the bridging of classical and jazz—are all approaches contrary to the direction taken by Ware throughout his career. Perhaps impressed by Ware's economy of materials and spaciousness of concept, Whitney Balliett wrote (perhaps a bit harshly) that Ware, by comparison, made “a good many of his colleagues sound like riveters.”¹⁷⁷ In any case, Ware's different concept distinguished his sound and approach from those of his colleagues in mainstream jazz.

¹⁷⁷ Quoted in Orin Keepnews, liner notes to *Man Bites Harmonica!*, by Jean Thielemans (Riverside OJCCD-1738-2, 1992, compact disc).

CHAPTER FOUR

APPROACH TO THE BASS

In both his ensemble and his solo playing, Ware favored the low and middle registers of the bass, consistently performing with a full, deep tone. He rarely made use of the instrument's upper range, which can be quite thin in pizzicato playing. Instead, he was devoted enough to the depths of the range to work at making his bottom end even thicker through the use of double stops. He described his own conception of bass sound in plain and simple terms:

I'm kind of prejudiced about basses. You might say I'm kind of old-fashioned because I lean towards [George] Duvivier and people like that, but I do look for certain things in bass. I look for the bottom, not the 'cello. If you're going to play 'cello, play 'cello, if you're going to play bass, play bass.¹⁷⁸

This philosophical attitude toward the sonic role of his instrument caused Ware to take an approach that can be conceptualized as “bass-centric.” As he worked to fill the bass range of the musical spectrum with as full a sound as possible, Ware utilized the inherent strengths of his instrument to provide a musical foundation for the groups with which he performed while creating an aural impression of size and power. This chapter examines Ware's approach to playing the bass, both as a member of the ensemble and as a soloist, in terms of his approach to sound, rhythm, and harmony. Some of the most valuable analysis of Ware's playing comes from his musical colleagues, especially the

¹⁷⁸ Wilmer, “Ware.”

musicians who performed with him over long periods of time, and their voices are given precedence in the discussion of the bassist's work.

The naturalness of Ware's approach to the bass is reflected in the words of drummer Wilbur Campbell, who was a musical partner and a close friend of Ware's for many years. He said that the bassist "had a well developed, heavy sound: a person-to-person sound. He played true notes."¹⁷⁹ Ware's ability to create this aural impression is based on his excellent intonation and his mastery of the strengths of his instrument. Cecil Forsyth's classic *Orchestration* of 1914 assumes a gut-string setup and technique and is, therefore, perhaps more appropriate to use in looking at Ware's playing than more modern works, which assume the use of the thin steel strings which became widely accepted after Ware's heyday. Forsyth asserts that the fifth and the octave are the strongest double stops on the bass and that the harmonics on the upper strings are the clearest.¹⁸⁰ Ware's preferred double stops are built of fourths and fifths, and the harmonics he uses most often are at the second partial on the top two strings. Forsyth's discussion of bass pizzicato almost seems like a prescient description of the well-placed harmonically and rhythmically interesting notes that Ware chose to use in place of the flurries of small note-values that would become commonplace in the virtuoso school of bass playing.

It is often surprising how few Bass *pizzicatos* are absolutely necessary in an orchestral ensemble . . . The *pizzicato* Bass not only lightens the weight of the whole orchestra but it also adds a sense of "point," of

¹⁷⁹ Litweiler, "Remembering," 82.

¹⁸⁰ Cecil Forsyth, *Orchestration* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1982), 443.

“movement,” of “something doing.” Even a single Bass note played *pizzicato* in the proper place can be eloquent and even poetical.¹⁸¹

This focus on the great impact of simple actions permeates Ware’s accompaniments and can also be seen to be the guiding principle in his solos. In his approach to both rhythm and harmony, Ware manages to make powerful statements with the most economic of means. What enables him to pull this off are the strong, foundational aspects of his sound and the close connection in his playing between his musical concepts and the sound properties of his instrument.

Ware won the admiration of his contemporaries through his ability to perform as an artistic and creative accompanist while still filling out the bass register and fulfilling a traditional bass function. In 1962, Aaron Bell, who followed Jimmy Woode as Duke Ellington’s bassist in a line that included Wellman Braud, Jimmy Blanton, Oscar Pettiford, and Charles Mingus, spoke of his admiration for Ware in terms that emphasize the success of Ware’s approach.

He is one of the few modern players that still plays *bass*. He’s very modern in his phrasing, in the overall conception of his lines, and in his mind, but he still plays bass. At the right time, it’s always there when you need it.¹⁸²

This low-register dependability of Ware’s won respect for the bassist from his peers. Pianist and vocalist Nina Simone is among those who valued Ware’s ability to fit into an ensemble situation and support the whole.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 451.

¹⁸² Stanley Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970), 209.

I must say, though, that I have done many concerts cold that have accidentally become albums. Like the second album I did at Town Hall. I hadn't seen the musicians who played with me that night until seven o'clock; we went on and did the concert cold, and it was recorded. If I had had a choice in the matter, I would not have done it that way. Fortunately, Wilbur Ware was on bass, but I get much too nervous to do anything cold, because jazz musicians like Wilbur Ware are rare! Most of the youngsters don't know beans about music, and I would never trust myself to do anything cold with them.¹⁸³

Of course, Ware's success as an ensemble player, while due in large part to his tone and his concept of the bass's function, also owes much to his knowledge of the instrument's tradition and his experiences in Chicago as a musical journeyman. However, it is Ware's idiosyncratic sense of rhythm and harmony that seems to have made the largest impact on the musicians he performed with.

It is Ware's conception of rhythm and meter that, understandably, made the biggest impression on drummer Leroy Williams, who worked with Ware first in Chicago and subsequently, after Ware had recommended him as a replacement for Ben

¹⁸³ Quoted in Taylor *Notes and Tones*, p. 153. However, I received the following email (dated July 17, 2002) from Roger Nupie, President of the International Dr. Nina Simone Fan Club:

I know Ware is mentioned in this interview, but I'm afraid Dr. Simone's info is not correct. There is no such thing as a second Town Hall album; that is the exact reason why it is not mentioned in our discography on the website! There is an album called *Town Hall Revisited* (a bootleg with edited versions of songs of the real Town Hall album and some different versions of songs from that Town Hall album, not recorded at Town Hall at all) "released" in the seventies! She might occasionally have worked with him, but I never found any evidence of that, as she had (a) regular group(s) of musicians in these days. He might have replaced her bassist Chris White, e.g.

Riley, in New York with Monk's group.¹⁸⁴ Describing playing with Ware and Monk, he gives a vivid description of the bassist's rhythmic sense.

Everybody interprets time differently, but some bass players not only have good time, but creative time. Wilbur Ware was one of my favorite bass players because he had a different sense of time. It was not straight time. He would do unexpected things with it. He had an uncanny way of being there when you thought he wasn't. He might go off rhythmically and you'd say, "How is he going to come back from there?" Some players can stretch the time to that fine line of almost turning the beat around, but they can always come back. For example, with Wilbur Ware in Monk's band, they would play so close to that thin line rhythmically that, if you weren't careful, you'd find yourself playing on "one" and "three," instead of "two" and "four." If you weren't careful, you'd be right off it. It has to do with where you put your accents when you're improvising. It was an amazing experience for me, like walking on a tightrope. Not everybody plays that way, but certain people like Barry Harris do. That's freedom to me. That's what I like.¹⁸⁵

This concept of rhythmic freedom within a system of regular metric pulse had been central to the practices of the first bebop generation years earlier. Compare the middle part of Williams' description with Miles Davis' recollection of working with Charlie Parker in the late 1940s:

I remember how at times he used to turn the rhythm section around when he and I, Max [Roach], and Duke Jordan were playing together . . . it sounded as if the rhythm section was on one and three instead of two and four. Every time that would happen, Max used to scream at Duke not to follow Bird but to stay where he was. Then eventually, it came around as Bird had planned and we were together again.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Berliner, 47.

¹⁸⁵ Quoted in Berliner, 381.

¹⁸⁶ Quoted in Thomas Owens, *Bebop: The Music and Its Players* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 252.

What differentiates Ware from the earlier musicians is his innovative adaptation of this technique to the bass. In the Parker example, the rhythmic conflict occurs between the soloist and the rhythm section, and it is the soloist who introduces the tension by playing against the prevailing metrical structure of the group. Ware reverses the paradigm, creating an underlying flexibility of beat that is heard from below the soloist and, as is the case with Ware's "Soul Station" solo (discussed below), causes the listener to hear the rest of the group in a new rhythmic context.

Ware approached the basic elements of rhythm and meter as material that could be used on the same level as harmony and compositional form as the structural building blocks for improvised solo statements. By simply varying his subdivision of the beat and moving the placement of his accents, Ware could restructure the overall rhythmic flow of the performance. Cook and Morton discuss this malleable rhythmic feel evident in Ware's playing.

He could solo at speed, shifting the time-signature from bar to bar while retaining an absolutely reliable pulse. Significantly, one of his most important employers was Thelonious Monk, who valued displacements of that sort within an essentially four-square rhythm and traditional (but not European-traditional) tonality¹⁸⁷

It is truly hard to recall a Monk composition that isn't in 4/4 time, yet the performances of his various quartets exhibit a great variety, largely due to this free and continually shifting approach to rhythmic emphasis. It is in the interaction of the players and their cross-rhythms that the musical interest and momentum is created.

¹⁸⁷ Cook , 1332.

The pairing of Monk and Ware is so musically successful because the two share a very similar musical approach. In addition to building the foundation of their innovations on traditional elements, they have in common a conception of both rhythm and harmony that focuses on displaced accents, rhythmic shifts, and unusual harmonic progressions.¹⁸⁸ They also “share a sense of construction that allows them to play with form, suspending the listener in mid-air or dropping them suddenly down a lift well, but always rescuing them at the last moment.”¹⁸⁹ The flip-side of this practice of manipulating formal structures is the desire of both Monk and Ware to create coherence in the performance of small ensembles, both within their own solo statements and in their accompaniments. Both would use repeated figures or concepts throughout a chorus of someone else’s solo to “set it up as a formal entity effective on its own and as a part of a larger progression of ideas.”¹⁹⁰ In appreciation of his shared approach with the pianist, Ware is repeatedly referred to by music critics as “the Monk of the bass.”

An example of Ware’s use of metrical shifting can be heard in the solo he performs on Jean Thieleman’s “Soul Station,” recorded in late 1957 or early 1958. Up until his single twelve-bar solo chorus, Ware plays a 4/4 walking bass line to accompany the other soloists. The heavily swung eighth notes of the group at this medium tempo almost give a feel of a 12/8 time signature. Ware makes use of this metrical duality by beginning his solo with a line of triplet eighth notes that are played

¹⁸⁸ Martin Williams quoted in Gitler, liner notes to *Monk with Coltrane*.

¹⁸⁹ John Clare, “Sights and Sound: Sonny Rollins, *Ballads*,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 July 2002, Metropolitan, 11.

¹⁹⁰ John H. Curry, *The Evolution of the String Bass in Jazz: 1940-1960*, Senior Honors Thesis, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 1984. Pages 72-73.

in a manner that the listener hears as quarter notes, giving the effect of suddenly moving the group into triple-time. Ware then moves into straight eighth notes that are so clearly played against the swing time of drummer Philly Joe Jones that they are heard as quarter notes in a suggestion of double timing the original tempo. Ware then moves into swung eighth notes that line up with Jones' cymbal patterns, which realigns the group swing 4/4 feel and brings his solo to a conclusion. Over the course of this solo, Ware manages to make the group sound as if it is shifting metrical structures, yet his accompanists do not alter the group's playing of the swung 4/4. By phrasing his subdivision of the beat in various ways, and through the strength and clarity of his attack and sound, Ware manages to recontextualize what the other performers are playing and cause the listener to hear the group in terms of his own rhythmic shifts, creating a rhythmically rich musical statement with the simplest of means.

Ware's concept of metrical alteration, while recognized at the time as a distinctive and innovative facet of his playing, can be traced to the work of bassists from several generations earlier. George Murphy "Pops" Foster (1892-1969), one of the very earliest known double bassists in jazz, used concepts very similar to Ware's on a recording of "Funky Butt" made with the Mezzrow-Bechet Quintet in December 1947.¹⁹¹ Although recorded at such a late date, the group performed in the traditional New Orleans style that many present at the session helped to create. Before his twenty-four-bar, two-chorus solo, Foster plays a half-note accompaniment in the 2/2 meter of the group. At his solo's opening, he switches to a 4/4 walking bass line, immediately

¹⁹¹ Sidney Bechet, *Masters of Jazz Vol. 4*, Storyville STCD 4104, 1987, compact disc.

changing the feel of the ensemble. He subsequently alternates freely between straight and swung eighth notes, which give the feel of, respectively, double-time in the new 4/4 setting (or quadruple the original tempo) and a swung 4/4 line in the time signature he has established. In the late 1960s, Foster himself said, “In New Orleans we picked two beats to the bar and in New York we started picking four to a bar. Now we pick four or eight beats to a bar or full note.”¹⁹² In this short solo, Foster demonstrates an ability to synthesize the various styles and rhythmic languages in which he is fluent into a coherent musical statement, much as Ware did in his own work.

Ware’s harmonic approach is clarified by John Coltrane, who uses terms similar to those of Williams to describe the liberating feeling of working with Ware in Monk’s 1957 group during those many times when the pianist would absent himself from the stage.

Obviously, with Monk, I had enormous freedom: sometimes, Monk went to the bar to get a drink and left us alone, Wilbur Ware, Shadow Wilson, and me, on the stage of the Five Spot. And we improvised without any constraints for a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, exploring our different instruments like madmen . . . [Sometimes] Monk . . . after two pieces, would return to the dressing room and stay there looking through the window for two or three hours.¹⁹³

Coltrane elaborated on Ware’s approach to accompaniment in an interview with August Blume that was first published in 1959. Coltrane, always obsessed with permutations and extensions of harmonic forms, focuses on Ware’s approach to harmonization and note choice.

¹⁹² Pops Foster as told to Tom Stoddard, *Pops Foster: The Autobiography of a New Orleans Jazzman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 76.

¹⁹³ Quoted in Porter, 111-112.

Blume: How did you used to feel when you were working down at the Five Spot and . . . in the middle of the tune Monk would get up from the piano and walk around to the side of it and do his little dance?

Coltrane: (Laughs.) I felt kind of lonesome (both laugh). Yeah, I felt a little lonesome up there.

Blume: When you're standing up there playing like that, how do you hear the changes? Do you think of the changes as you go along or does the bass player suggest them to you by what he's playing?

Coltrane: Yeah, the bass player—I count on him, you know.

Blume: What does he actually do? Like when Wilbur would be playing bass, would he play like the dominant note in each chord? I don't know how you phrase it.

Coltrane: Well, at times. But a bass player like Wilbur Ware, he's so inventive, man, you know he doesn't always play the dominant notes.

Blume: But whatever he plays, it sort of suggests notes that gives you an idea of which way the changes are going?

Coltrane: Yeah, it may be—and it might not be. Because Wilbur, he plays the other way sometimes. He plays things that are foreign. If you didn't know the song, you wouldn't be able to find it. Because he's superimposing things. He's playing around, and under, and over—building tension, so when he comes back to it you feel everything sets in. But usually I know the tunes—I know the changes anyway. So we manage to come out at the end together anyway.

Blume: Which always helps! (Both laugh.)

Coltrane: Yeah, we manage to finish on time. A lot of fun playing that way though.

Blume: I can imagine.

Coltrane: A lot of fun. (Pause.) Like sometimes he would be playing altered changes and I would be playing altered changes. And he would be playing some other kind of altered changes from the [ones] I'd be playing and neither one of us would be playing the changes of the tune until we'd reach a certain spot, and we'd get there together. We're lucky

(both laugh). And then Monk comes back in to save everybody. But nobody knows where he is [in the form of the tune]! (Both laugh.) That's what impresses a lot of people anyway. They say, "How do you guys remember all that stuff?" We weren't really remembering much. Just the basic changes and then everybody (would) just try out anything they wanted to try on it.¹⁹⁴

An example of this type of suggestive note-choice on Ware's part can be heard on the recording of "Well, You Needn't" recorded in 1957 for the *Monk's Music* LP. In the final two bars of the bridge, the group usually harmonizes both the melody and the improvised solos with the progression Db7 / C7 / B7 / C7 (two beats per chord). However, in this spot during Monk's second chorus, Ware plays the pitches Ab, Db, G, C (again, two beats apiece). The pitches can be viewed as components or extensions of the original chords (5th, b9, b6, root), but Ware's placement of the notes in the lower range of the bass causes the listener to hear them as roots. In such a hearing, they imply a pair of ii7 / V7 progressions that descend chromatically. This keeps the chromatic feel of the original progression, but in an altered context. This type of harmonic substitution is most successful when the new and the original chords have a close relationship (in terms of common tones) and preserve the overall progressional direction and structural function of the original.¹⁹⁵ In this instance, Ware's reharmonization clearly meets these criteria. Here and throughout his career, Ware is

¹⁹⁴ This interview originally appeared in abbreviated form as August Blume, "An Interview with John Coltrane," *Jazz Review*, January 1959, 25. An expanded version is in Porter, 112-113.

¹⁹⁵ Berliner, 84.

“ever redefining his role, from accompaniment to counterpoint, from root line to harmonic ambiguity.”¹⁹⁶

This type of harmonic flexibility led bassist Bill Crow to write in 1959 that Ware “was an ideal bassist for Monk, since he seems to share Monk’s conception of the value of open space, repeated figures, cycles of intervals, rhythmic tension and relaxation . . . and at the same time he tends to the business of providing strong roots that give Monk’s harmonic conception an added richness.”¹⁹⁷ The approach to root-movement that is evident in the example from “Well, You Needn’t” shows exactly these proclivities on Ware’s part. The progression he implies shows Ware’s fondness for oblique motion around the circle of fifths, a predilection that is itself predicated on the natural layout of his instrument, as Crow explains.

Since the bass is tuned in fourths, this interval and the neighboring fifth are the easiest to finger anywhere on the instrument, and Wilbur makes use of them more frequently than any others. He does it, however, with such imagination that he has developed it into a formal style within which he functions beautifully. He often uses these intervals as double-stops, moving them however the harmony will allow parallel movement, but never allowing himself to be backed into a corner where the continuation of an idea in double-stops would require an impossible fingering. It’s also interesting to notice his use of octaves and open string harmonics, as easily-fingered ways to extend the basic chord into different registers of the instrument without running chords and scales.¹⁹⁸

This utilization of the inherent qualities of his instrument thus reveals itself not just in the range in which Ware chooses to play, but even in the types of harmonic progressions and accompanimental figures he utilizes. By using these properties to his

¹⁹⁶ Litweiler, “Remembering,” 85.

¹⁹⁷ Crow, 16.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

advantage, Ware maximizes the sound potential of his instrument while giving a solid musical structure to his parts.

Ware's overall approach to the bass was made up of an interaction between his individualistic approaches to sound, rhythm, and harmony. He made use of basic musical fundamentals in an original manner to create a new way of playing that was heard by his contemporaries as something different from what other bassists were doing at the time. By focusing on relatively simple devices used in a novel manner, Ware was able to forge a deeply personal style.

Wilbur is, for me, a reaffirmation of the idea that deep expression can be reached through simplification of form—each new discovery need not always be a more complex one. The difference between the extremely sophisticated simplicity of Wilbur Ware and the primitive simplicity of a beginner is as wide as that between simple drawings by Klee and Miro and those of a child. Artistic curiosity will constantly experiment with mechanical complexity, but it is the resolution of such constructions into simple universal terms that is ultimately satisfying. Wilbur's terms are simple, and his artistic expression most profound.¹⁹⁹

—Bill Crow

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 16.

CHAPTER FIVE

INFLUENCE

Bassist Wilbur Ware, who has, since these sides were cut [in 1956], gained nation-wide stature as the bass-man of today from whom tomorrow's stylings will derive, readily exhibits the talents that make the aforementioned comments so appropriate.²⁰⁰

—Joe Segal, circa 1959

Already in the late 1950s, critical observers noticed that Ware exhibited qualities as a performer that made him seem ahead of his time. The same approach to the bass that linked him to an older generation of players and set him apart from his contemporaries also heralded a new style that would become readily adopted and adapted by the succeeding generation of bassists who mostly worked in the new, freer style of music that was developed in the 1960s. In 1959, Martin Williams wrote,

There are two further hints, I think, about the future role of the bass. These are found in the development of orthodox playing which Charlie Mingus has made, and in the heterodox style of the still-developing Wilbur Ware . . . Ware's style is deceptively simple on the surface, but the technical, percussive, and harmonic freedom with which he plays shows that, with discipline, he may not only become an excellent rhythm bassist but one with a unique melodic approach to the role of his instrument both in ensemble and in solo.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Joe Segal, liner notes to *The Johnny Griffin Quartet*, by Johnny Griffin (MCA Victor Japan MVCR-20058, 1997, compact disc).

²⁰¹ Martin Williams, "The Funky-Hard Bop Regression," in *The Art of Jazz: Essays on the Nature and Development of Jazz*, ed. Martin T. Williams (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 235.

These qualities were eminently suited to the new approaches in jazz composition and performance. This chapter examines how the style that Ware developed while playing in the context of the hard bop style of the late 1950s became an integral part of the music of the next generation and looks at the major bass players who came up in the 1960s under the influence of Ware.

Throughout the 1950s, performers experimented with the formal arrangement of the small ensemble. Baritone saxophonist Gerry Mulligan led a pianoless quartet featuring trumpeter Chet Baker and various bassists and drummers on the West Coast in the early years of the decade; tenor saxophonist Lucky Thompson made a set of important recordings with guitarist Skeeter Best and Oscar Pettiford in 1956; and Jimmy Giuffre unveiled his Jimmy Giuffre 3 in 1957, with the leader on clarinet and saxophone (tenor and baritone), Jim Hall on guitar, and either Charles Atlas or Ralph Peña on bass. This trend continued to be developed by the generation of musicians focusing on free music in the 1960s. John Coltrane recorded an album of tenor saxophone and drum duets with Rashied Ali in 1967; the original lineup of the Art Ensemble of Chicago featured Lester Bowie on trumpet, Roscoe Mitchell and Joseph Jarman on woodwinds, and Malachi Favors on bass; by 1968, Anthony Braxton was playing “new jazz” with a trio featuring himself on woodwinds, Leroy Jenkins on violin and viola, and Leo Smith on trumpet. These later groups tended to feature players who played several instruments, much as Giuffre had done in the 1950s, but now expanded to include such non-traditional instruments as harmonica, kazoo, sirens, and huge batteries of percussion from around the world.

In 1957, Orin Keepnews examined the trend towards playing without piano accompaniment:

The concept is one that has been gaining some momentum lately—not only in pianoless units, but also in the tendency towards “strolling” solo choruses, backed only by bass and drums, in bands with conventional instrumentation. It’s not that anyone has anything against the piano, but rather that (as Gerry Mulligan and others pointed up a few years ago) the omission of piano chordings offers certain kinds of musical freedom that are otherwise difficult to get at.²⁰²

Keepnews uses terms similar to those used by Coltrane in his description of performing at the Five Spot on the occasions when Monk would allow him to “stroll” with only the accompaniment of Ware and drummer Shadow Wilson (quoted in the previous chapter). Ware’s pianoless recordings with Sonny Rollins have been seen as a watershed in a period that was moving to ever-increasing musical freedom. Eric Nisenson writes that

Ware’s style, like that of LaRoca and Jones, prefigured the innovations for the bass that would occur in the 1960s. Ware’s beautiful, deep tone made him a perfect accompanist but, like Charles Mingus, he was more than just a timekeeper. His melodic and harmonically inventive style was, like Sonny’s own playing, a bridge between the jazz advances of [the 1960s and the older style] of the 1940s.²⁰³

In describing the Rollins recording, Bob Blumenthal goes even farther, saying that, “Even though the term is generally applied to improvisations that omit fixed harmonies, these takes could easily be considered the beginning of energy music.”²⁰⁴ While this

²⁰² Orin Keepnews, liner notes to *2 Horns/2 Rhythm*, by Kenny Dorham (Riverside OJCCD-463-2, 1990, compact disc).

²⁰³ Nisenson, 120.

²⁰⁴ Bob Blumenthal, liner notes to *A Night at the Village Vanguard*, by Sonny Rollins (Blue Note 7243 4 99795 2 9, 1999, 2 compact discs).

seems a bit extreme, it is clearly true that Ware's live recordings with Rollins "are enlivened by a spirit of spontaneity, unpredictability, and experimentation."²⁰⁵ This is due in no small part to the absence of an obvious harmonic instrument and the flexibility of Ware's approach.

Johnny Griffin also took advantage of Ware's strength as an accompanist who could function independently of the standard rhythm section, as evidenced on the several tracks on 1958's *Johnny Griffin Sextet* that feature passages of only the tenor saxophonist and the bassist. Ware supports Griffin ably and makes liberal use of pedal points and double stops. As early as 1946, the wonderfully opinionated clarinetist Mezz Mezzrow expressed a discomfort with the role the piano played in the small ensemble, saying, "Now don't misunderstand me, I think the piano is a wonderful instrument, but the real jazz was born from march time and the piano can only fit into it as a rhythm instrument; you've got to get somebody to play it who has a very congenial nature, won't hog the spotlight all to himself but devotes himself to helping all the other artists to express themselves."²⁰⁶ Ware himself obviously had a "congenial nature," judging from the wholeheartedness with which he approached ensemble playing. With his emphasis on largeness of sound to fill out the low register and simultaneous delineation and manipulation of structure, Ware was the ideal bassist for groups that performed without a pianist. These qualities, evident in his playing in the 1950s, were among the elements that made Ware a role model for the next generation.

²⁰⁵ Wilson, 147.

²⁰⁶ Milton "Mezz" Mezzrow and Bernard Wolfe, *Really the Blues* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1957), 362.

Ware's approach to the bass was particularly well-suited conceptually to the freer music of the 1960s. Self-consciously seeking to avoid basing their music on functional harmonic progressions, the younger musicians instead focused on sound, melody, and rhythm as the foundation of their improvisations. Ware's focus on maximizing the volume and thickness of his sound became even more important when pianos or other harmonic instruments were no longer assumed to be intrinsically necessary to the formation of the working ensemble and a greater responsibility for creating a full group sound fell on the shoulders of the bassist. Ware's concepts also fit perfectly with an emphasis on melodic line independent of harmonic progression, as in the harmolodic theories of Ornette Coleman. These new ideas were, in a sense, more closely related to the polyphonic textures improvised by the New Orleans musicians playing in the early decades of the century than to the recycling of harmonic form that became common practice in the succeeding years. Ware's affinity for the melodic yet supportive accompaniments of Page and Crosby was eminently compatible with a way of performing that demanded the full engagement of every player as an equal part in an ensemble texture. The foregrounding of rhythmic concerns by the free players also locked in with the work Ware had been doing in the 1950s. His use of repeated rhythmic figures to unify works and his manipulation of beat subdivision to recontextualize the metric structures of group performances were tailor-made for the new music. The ease with which Ware's emphasis on repeated figures and use of rhythmic shifting fits with newer conceptions can be heard on Charles Moffett's *The Gift* (recorded in 1968); the bassist's conception locks in tightly with the combination

of freedom and earthiness in Moffett's group. Ware's combination of old-timey, pre-bop influences also linked him with Moffett's former boss, the innovative saxophonist Ornette Coleman, who, despite his advanced concepts, was portrayed in the press as a "corn-pone musician."²⁰⁷

Ware's emphasis on pedal points and his use of open fifths and fourths, both melodically and as double stops, was so eagerly adopted by the free players that it quickly became fundamental to the style. The adaptability of these ideas to free music lies in the multiplicity of contrapuntal interpretations they suggest. To understand this, consider the case of the typical 1950s small ensemble. Behind the saxophone soloist, the pianist plays a steady stream of chords that delineate the harmonic progression, while the bassist plays a walking bass line in quarter notes that also outlines the chords. To a large extent, this limits the soloist as to choice of notes and alteration of the basic harmonic progression. Of course, in the best of all possible worlds, a top-notch rhythm section would be able to hear or anticipate the soloist's chordal substitutions and digressions and move with them. It would also be hoped that the soloist and rhythm players could negotiate these changes in a give-and-take fashion, playing off of each others' moves.

However, witness Coltrane's comments on the freedom that he felt when Monk would leave him on stage with just the bassist and drummer. Coltrane became so enamored of this freedom that he would often have McCoy Tyner leave the piano during performances of the classic Coltrane Quartet in the early 1960s and sometimes

²⁰⁷ Litweiler, *Coleman*, 89.

play long stretches with the sole accompaniment of Elvin Jones' thundering drums. Even with the best straight-ahead rhythm section, the expressive capabilities of the soloist are necessarily placed within certain limits. On the other hand, consider a performance with only saxophone, bass, and drums. The bassist can still function almost in the fashion of the piano; by running full arpeggios and clearly marking harmonic progression and cadence, the bassist encompasses the saxophonist in a harmonic web almost as dense as that woven by the pianist. However, if the bassist makes great use of pedal tones and fourth/fifth intervals, the soloist is given a wider interpretive latitude.

For example, if a bassist plays the pitches C, E, G, and B in quarter notes within a given measure, the harmony is clearly that of a C major seventh chord. The soloist can, of course, play altered tones or chord substitutions, but they are inevitably heard in the context of the bass harmony. If the bassist instead pedals a C, the soloist is free to play a C major seventh chord, a C dominant chord, a C minor seventh, a C diminished, or any chord with C as a root. Furthermore, the soloist can view the C as the fifth of a chord, or any other scale degree. The bass is usually heard as playing a lower chord tone, but not necessarily. When the bassist plays open fifths or fourths, there are still few constraints on the soloist as to chord quality and determination of the bass notes' harmonic function.

Ware, of course, tended to play in this type of open-ended manner, and his playing was used as a model by the next generation. What makes Ware's position in music history so interesting is that he himself went on to play with the young outsiders,

despite his status as something of an elder statesman. Perhaps what made Ware fit in so well with the next generation was his emphasis on group interplay and improvisation over individualistic showboating. This focus was one of the defining characteristics of the new music, especially that coming out of Chicago's AACM (Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians), an organization that included such ensemble-oriented groups as the Art Ensemble of Chicago and the trio led by saxophonist Anthony Braxton that featured trumpeter Leo Smith and violinist Leroy Jenkins. Ware's contentment with his ensemble role was illustrated by his behavior while recording his solo album for Riverside in 1957:

As a leader, he has been convinced to take a bit—but not too much—more of the spotlight. He does solo extensively on *Body and Soul* and *The Man I Love*, extracting surprising freshness from these often-used pieces. And *Lullaby of the Leaves* is a tour de force, turned over almost entirely to the bass (*but* it took considerable effort to talk him into that one).

For the rest, though, Ware played down his solo role, and avoided any suggestions of unusual recording balance to favor the bass sound. What he wanted—and what he got—was an album straightforwardly devoted to the kind of jazz he feels most at home with, which does happen to be a music in which a strong bass plays a very key part²⁰⁸

Moving into the emerging new music scene in the early 1960s, Ware made a great impression. In 1961, LeRoi Jones set up a list of the players of various instruments he “intend[ed] to hamper with *nom de guerre* avant-garde.” On bass, he listed Ware, Charlie Haden, Scott LaFaro, and Buell Neidlinger.²⁰⁹ He continued by saying, “There are more bass players than anything else simply because the chief innovator on that

²⁰⁸ Orin Keepnews, liner notes to *Chicago Sound*.

²⁰⁹ Jones, 73.

instrument, Wilbur Ware, has been around longer and more people have had a chance to pick up.”²¹⁰

When Ware returned to the bass after his hiatus in the mid-1960s, he began playing in Chicago with musicians who were at the forefront of experimental music.

John Litweiler was an eyewitness in 1967 to these events.

So when Ware replaced [Charles] Clark, [Andrew] Hill (perhaps remembering Ware’s old Riverside record) called for *The Man I Love* and proceeded to play the first cohesive piano solo of the night, definitely his best improvising of the concert—on a song with chord changes! [Roscoe] Mitchell, on alto, nearly covered Hill’s last eight, and then again tore it up beautifully (without playing changes at all). But Ware was demonstrating another kind of freedom—he never strayed from the song’s harmonic heart, and his style (as ever) was no more than pivoting brief off-rhythm sequences against a consistent springing (not walking) four, but his timed space-accent and his structure matched Mitchell’s own mind excellently, so the two agreed to disagree at length in a worthy, and curious, duet. Clear beyond the gap of generations, Ware’s emotional freedom was as close kin to Mitchell’s as it was unrelated to Hill’s musical hang-ups . . . And though Ware was playing from reflex this time, his music sounded as free as Mitchell’s fanciful explorations. A performance like this defines, from several directions, what “free jazz” means.²¹¹

Ware made enough of an impact upon his return to New York in the late 1960s and his acceptance into the new music scene that historian Joachim Berendt posited him neither in the trail-blazing hard-bop school or the early free players, but as part of the modern group that sprang up much later. He lists the hard-bop bassists as Paul Chambers, Jimmy Woode, Wilbur Little, Jymie Merritt, Sam Jones, Doug Watkins, and Reginald Workman. He considers the second bass “emancipation” (after Blanton) to

²¹⁰ Ibid., 74.

²¹¹ Litweiler, “In Person,” 30.

have been developed by Charlie Haden and Scott LaFaro. He finishes his trajectory by stating that out of these players came a “younger generation who have come to attention during the late sixties and early seventies”; he places Ware in the company of Art Davis, Ron Carter, Richard Davis, Chuck Israels, Gary Peacock, Steve Swallow, Barre Phillips, Eddie Gomez, Cecil McBee, Buster Williams, Malachi Favors, Alan Silva, Henry Grimes, Stanley Clarke, Niels Henning Örsted-Pedersen, Dave Holland, Miroslav Vitous, and George Mraz.²¹²

Several things are quite strange about this positioning of the bass lineage. Given the chronology, let alone playing style, Ware clearly belongs in the hard-bop school, whatever his influence or later playing associations may have been; if anything, he became known in that area and then moved with the music as it developed. To place him solely in the final category, however, puts him in the position of following an avowed disciple (Haden) and being in the same school as one of his students (Favors), someone he knew when he was already a master player on the Chicago scene and the younger player was still just starting out as a young professional (Richard Davis), and someone who was influenced by *that* player (McBee). Perhaps he should be placed in all three schools.²¹³ On Ware’s death in 1979, Litweiler wrote, “. . . equally at home in

²¹² Joachim Berendt, *The Jazz Book: From New Orleans to Rock and Free Jazz* (New York: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1975), 281-282.

²¹³ Another strange placement of Ware is by Joe Goldberg, who writes:
Aside from the guitar conception, there is a much more basic advance which LaFaro (and other bassists such as Wilbur Ware and Charlie Haden) are helping to initiate; prior to them, most bassists were so steeped in their roles as timekeepers that, during their solos, they would simply continue to keep time, only with a more interesting choice of

swing-styled bands and the avant garde, he linked five decades through a great original spontaneous sensitivity combined with highly refined musical knowledge and technical self-awareness: what, in jazz, is called ‘style.’”²¹⁴ Many of those who followed in Ware’s footsteps took a similar approach to the use of musical materials and sought to perform in a way that combined a great breadth of experience into fresh creations.

One of the closest bassists to Ware in the next generation was Malachi Favors (b. 1937). Favors was the son of a minister who left Mississippi for Chicago, where the future bassist was born. He grew up on the South Side, performing as the bass singer in a “street corner doo-wop group that never got off the ground.”²¹⁵ After seeing a concert by Duke Ellington at the Regal on New York’s 47th Street that featured Oscar Pettiford, Malachi Favors was inspired to get a bass and start studying. He quickly ran into Wilbur Ware in Chicago and began studying with him.²¹⁶ Favors recalls his first personal encounter with a bass:

I went to church one Sunday, and a fellow had a bass in the church. And I went to touch the strings, and it was so hard to push them down, I just said, “no, no, I’m not going to deal with this.” Then, I went up to DuSable High School, which was *the* music centre on the South Side. And I saw Betty Dupree—who’s still playing today—practicing in the hallway. I said to myself, “if this *girl* can pull those strings, I know I can.” And that encouraged me to get a bass.²¹⁷

notes [Joe Goldberg, liner notes to *Waltz for Debby*, by Bill Evans (Riverside OJCCD-210-2, 1992, compact disc)].

Ware often did play walking bass solos, of course, and both he and Haden used a similar rhythmic vocabulary in their accompaniment and solos.

²¹⁴ Litweiler, “Remembering,” 27.

²¹⁵ Aaron Cohen, “Malachi Favors Maghostut: Natural & Spiritual,” *Coda Magazine*, July/August 1994, 4.

²¹⁶ Panken, “Bowie and Favors.”

²¹⁷ Cohen, 5.

In addition to Ware, Favors names Israel Crosby and Paul Chambers (with whom he was good friends) as major influences. In the mid-1950s, Favors played with Chicago musicians including Andrew Hill and King Fleming. He met Roscoe Mitchell while attending Wilson Junior College (today's Kennedy-King) and began to play with what would eventually become the Art Ensemble of Chicago. In 1965, Favors joined the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM).²¹⁸

Ware served as a personal guide for Favors in much the way Crosby and the earlier Chicago bassists had been his own role models. At this point, the Chicago bass tradition was still going strong, and musical information was being passed down as an intimate oral tradition. As the new, free music was taking form, Favors used the approach he had learned from Ware to help create the new forms. Speaking about the labels "avant garde" and "outside," Malachi Favors said:

I don't mind being considered an outsider. We don't make the distinction between inside, and outside. We call it Great Black Music. There's a whole lot of great inside musicians who I look up to. But they would go further if they had the mind to go out. But I understand that they just can't do that. It isn't that easy. Insofar as being an outside musician, you have to go through a transformation. You can't just jump up and play out. Some musicians have said that but they are sadly mistaken. If they could do it, they would. My thing comes when I hit the stand. Until that time, I don't know what I might do.²¹⁹

Favors obviously considered Ware to be one of the inside musicians who could make the transition. In October 1976, Favors recorded "W.W. (Dedicated to Wilbur Ware)"

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 6.

by Muhal Richard Abrams.²²⁰ The piece begins with Favors singing and creating various percussion textures and continues into an unaccompanied bass theme statement, improvisation, and theme recapitulation. Favor's respect for Ware was returned; in 1971, Ware said, "Oh God, though, you'd be surprised at the bass players I like, but the guy I really dig so much and I wish he'd get some recognition, is Malachi Favors. He did more than anyone to give me a little confidence during the years when I was back to the 'forties."²²¹

The bassist of the next generation whose name is most often associated with Ware's is Charles Edward Haden (b. 1937), born in Shenandoah, Iowa. His family members made up the lineup in a bluegrass and hillbilly gospel music act that performed around the Midwest at county fairs and revival meetings. In the late 1930s, the Haden Family had a radio show that went on the air twice a day from Shenandoah out of a 50,000-watt station. After his mother noticed young Charlie humming along while she sang him lullabies, the future bassist began singing on the air at 22 months of age as "the little yodelin' cowboy." Haden continued to sing with the group, including through its relocation to Springfield, Missouri, but had to give up singing after his face and throat nerves were weakened by a bout with polio at age 15. The year 1955 saw Haden playing bass on country singer Red Foley's network television show, which was produced in Springfield. After relocating to Los Angeles to attend Westlake College of Music, Haden was playing with Elmo Hope, Hampton Hawes, Art Pepper, and Ware

²²⁰ Muhal Richard Abrams featuring Malachi Favors, *Sightsong*, Black Saint 120003-1, 1993, compact disc.

²²¹ Wilmer, "Ware."

recording partner Sonny Clark by 1957 and began working a long-term gig with Paul Bley at the Hillcrest Club that same year. Haden brought new friends Ornette Coleman and Don Cherry into Bley's group in 1958; Coleman's future drummer Billy Higgins was already in the group. Haden went with the Coleman quartet to New York in 1959 for an extended stay at the Five Spot and played on Coleman's groundbreaking first records for Atlantic. In the 1960s, Haden worked with Alice Coltrane, Archie Shepp, Roswell Rudd, and others involved in the new music. In the late 1960s, Haden formed the Liberation Music Orchestra. Later groups include Old and New Dreams (with former Coleman sidemen Cherry, Dewey Redman, and Ed Blackwell) and the financially and critically successful Quartet West (with Ernie Watts, Alan Broadbent, and Larance Marable).²²²

Haden is quick to acknowledge his debt to Ware as a major influence on his approach to the bass. Much as Ware credited Crosby with opening his mind to the possibilities of pedal tones, Haden gives credit to Ware for inspiring the use of double stops that became a prime feature of his own playing.²²³ In 1960, Hsio Wen Shih placed Haden as the prime follower of Ware and wrote, "Haden's bass solo [on *Ramblin'*], mostly in double stops, shows us that he is technically a masterful bassist, and also suggests how much wider and more rewarding his sources are than those of most jazz bass players; he may be the first bassist since Wilbur Ware to move away

²²² Robert Palmer, liner notes to *Beauty is a Rare Thing*, by Ornette Coleman (Atlantic R2 71410, 1993, compact disc box set), 20; Litweiler, *Ornette*, 44; Chris Kelsey, "Charlie Haden," <http://www.allmusic.com>.

²²³ Len Lyons and Don Perlo, *Jazz Portraits: The Lives and Music of the Jazz Masters* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1989), 243.

from the Blanton-Pettiford-Brown axis.”²²⁴ This divergence from the Blanton school links Haden both to Ware and to the older tradition that Ware was influenced by.

Harvey Pekar wrote of this connection in 1962: “His avant-garde conception notwithstanding, Haden is a throwback to powerhouse musicians like Walter Page and Wellman Braud; his playing is extremely percussive, and he prefers the lower register.”²²⁵ Robert Palmer realized the roots of this connection.

Charlie Haden has been closely associated with Ornette Coleman's music since the late 1950's, but his work springs directly from the tradition of jazz bassists exemplified by Walter Page, Jimmy Blanton, and Wilbur Ware. Each of these players had a different melodic conception, but all of them believed the bassist's job was to fill out the bottom of the band with a big, fat sound and to firmly anchor the music's flights of fancy.²²⁶

Haden has often said that the range and sound of a bass note is more important than its specific pitch class, which not only shows an alignment with Ware's preference for low-end work, but ties Haden to Pops Foster, the bassist from the earliest days of jazz in New Orleans, who is reported as saying, “Hell, I just play any old go-to-hell note, as long as it swings!”²²⁷

Another highly visible bassist who utilized an approach similar to Ware's was Jimmy Garrison (1934-1976), who was born in Miami and grew up in Philadelphia. He

²²⁴ Hsio Wen Shih, review of *Change of the Century*, by Ornette Coleman, *Jazz Review* Volume 3, Number 3 (November 1960): 24.

²²⁵ Pekar, 21.

²²⁶ Robert Palmer, “Pop and Jazz Guide,” *The New York Times*, 13 June 1986, Late City Final Edition, Section C, 26.

²²⁷ Quoted in Bertram Turetzky, introduction to *Pops Foster: The Autobiography of a New Orleans Jazzman*, by Pops Foster as told to Tom Stoddard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), xviii.

learned to play bass and played in the local scene that featured McCoy Tyner, Reggie Workman, Henry Grimes, and Lee Morgan. From 1957 to 1960, Garrison worked with Ware collaborators Kenny Dorham and Philly Joe Jones. During the same period, he also worked with Tony Scott, Bill Barron, Lee Konitz, and Jackie McLean. By the end of this period, he was working with both Ornette Coleman and John Coltrane, and also with Cal Massey and Walter Bishop, Jr. Between 1962 and 1967, Garrison was the full-time bassist for the Coltrane Quartet with McCoy Tyner and Elvin Jones. One of Garrison's students was William Parker, who rose to international fame in the 1990s as a soloist, composer, and leader in the free jazz idiom. Garrison died on April 7, 1976 in New York.²²⁸

Garrison's overall approach to the bass bears great similarity to Ware's. He made regular use of pedal points and double stops, in both his accompaniments and solos, and favored the lower and middle registers of the bass. His sound was percussive but also huge and full. His greatest contributions were probably in the modal and free music of the later Coltrane groups, in which the saxophonist would often stroll with Garrison as he had done with Ware years earlier at the Five Spot. As quoted in the first chapter, Coltrane had considered Ware for the spot in his group that was eventually filled by Garrison, and it was most likely the qualities he shared with Ware that drew Coltrane to the younger bassist.

²²⁸ Chris Kelsey, "Jimmy Garrison," <http://www.allmusic.com>.

Richard Davis (b. 1930), a Chicago native, belongs to the virtuosic bass tradition, but pays his respects to Ware as someone who was a major figure on the Chicago scene when the younger bassist was first coming up.

Interviewer Ted Panken: You've mentioned a few names in the last couple of minutes who I'd like you to comment on. The first is Wilbur Ware, who really held sway over all the bassists in Chicago at that particular time, I think.

Davis: Yeah, he was the king. He was the king.

Davis first met Ware in Calumet City, Indiana (not far from Chicago), where both the older bassist and the youngster were working in burlesque house bands.²²⁹ Davis recalls playing a show in Chicago when Ware sat in with the group, as did Ike Day, a drummer with whom Ware roomed for a time.

. . . I was fascinated, because I saw this very small, skinny guy approach the drums, while I was playing, and when he started to play it was like a football field. Every person in the audience started saying "Ike Day, Ike Day, Ike Day." And I looked around, and I got very nervous, because then I knew who it was. And then Wilbur Ware came up with his bass, and we played together, two basses and Ike Day and whoever was in the front line.²³⁰

Known later in his career for his extreme versatility and virtuosity, Davis originally played in a more traditional manner. As late as 1961, he was taking melodically-inflected walking bass solos on medium-up compositions like Eric Dolphy's "Number Eight (Potsa Lotsa)," (performed at half-note equals 116) at Ware's frequent

²²⁹ Dan Morgenstern, "Richard Davis, The Complete Musician," *Down Beat*, 2 June 1966, 23.

²³⁰ Ted Panken, "Richard Davis."

performance residence, the Five Spot in New York.²³¹ Davis replaced Israel Crosby in Ahmad Jamal's working group from 1953-1954 when the bassist left to work with Benny Goodman and others, and the melodic nature of his walking bass lines in this early period owes much to this influence that he has in common with Ware.

Several other bassists of the next Chicago generation were personally influenced by Ware. A student of Ware's who became "the busiest, most popular AACM member," Charles Clark was a young Chicago bassist who worked as a central figure in the early music of Joseph Jarman.²³² Clark died at age 24 on April 15, 1969 of a cerebral hemorrhage while coming home from a rehearsal with the Chicago Civic Orchestra—an instant and unexpected death for a healthy young man.²³³ Donald Rafael Garrett went to high school in Chicago with two who would become major figures on the saxophone, John Gilmore and Clifford Jordan. Garrett's problems with heroin brought him to the Federal Narcotics Institution in Lexington, where he met Wilbur Ware. Garrett had already become known as a performer on the clarinet and saxophone; after meeting Ware, he was influenced to add "bassist" to his list of talents.²³⁴

Stafford Louis James (b. 1946) was born in Evanston, Illinois, on Chicago's North Side, and acknowledged Ware as a mentor.²³⁵ James first became known in the

²³¹ Eric Dolphy and Booker Little, *Memorial Album*, Prestige OJCCD-353-2, 1989, compact disc.

²³² Quoted without attribution in Wilmer, *Serious*, 122.

²³³ "Final Bar," *Down Beat*, 29 May 1969, 10.

²³⁴ Wilmer, *Serious*, 138.

²³⁵ Case.

late 1960s as a sideman with Albert Ayler, Monty Alexander, and Ware's old friend Sun Ra. During this period and into the early 1970s, James studied at both the Chicago Conservatory and Mannes College. During the early and middle 1970s, he worked with Melba Moore, Roy Ayers, Gary Bartz, Rashied Ali, Betty Carter, Al Haig, Barry Harris, Andrew Cyrille, Chico Hamilton, and Ware collaborators Art Blakey and Andrew Hill. In the latter part of the decade, he worked with Dexter Gordon, John Scofield, and Woody Shaw (with whom he also worked during the early 1980s). In the 1980s, he worked with Slide Hampton, Cecil Payne, Jimmy Heath, and Ware's rhythm-section partner Philly Joe Jones in the drummer's Dameronia group that played the music of Tadd Dameron.²³⁶

Ware's influence on the next generation of players moved beyond those who played the bass. Personal connection amongst those involved in the music scene, as much as Ware's actual playing, created a bond between the bassist and the younger musicians as part of an ongoing passing-on of tradition. Saxophonist Henry Threadgill, another key member of the AACM, recalls Ware's impact.

Threadgill: Wilbur had a great influence on all the players I knew around Chicago, and here in New York, too.

Interviewer Ted Panken: When did you first meet him?

Threadgill: Oh God, I don't even remember what age I was. He and my uncle Nevin Wilson used to run together. I've been knowing Wilbur Ware since I was a kid. I don't even remember.

Panken: He was a bassist and a drummer at one point. He lived with the great Chicago drummer Ike Day, and was I gather a very good dancer as well.²³⁷

²³⁶ Ron Wynn, "Stafford James," <http://www.allmusic.com>.

²³⁷ Ted Panken, "Henry Threadgill: Influences, July 24, 1996, WKCR-FM," <http://www.jazzhouse.org/library/>.

Tenor saxophonist Archie Shepp often stopped by Ware's home so that the bassist could teach him the bridge sections to a number of standards. Ware's wife recalled, "He was very interested in getting an older man to show him."²³⁸ Drummer Famadou Don Moye, best known for his work with the Art Ensemble of Chicago (with bassist Malachi Favors), recorded his composition "Ode to Wilbur Ware" in May 1988 with the Leaders Trio (Moye, Kirk Lightsey, and Cecil McBee).²³⁹ The piece begins with piano, percussion, and solo arco bass in free time, moving into an extended groove-structure with overdubbed arco and pizzicato basses, flutes, piano, and percussion.

On Ware's death, John Litweiler reflected on his legacy: "Was Ware's influence slim, limited to Haden and a handful of Chicagoans? His unsentimental toughness, the integrity of his sharing are reflected today in the work of Fred Hopkins, the dark visions of virtuoso Malachi Favors, the irrepressible spirits of David Holland—the mainstream of our most modernist styles."²⁴⁰ Ware's idiosyncratic approach to the bass, built on a combination of tradition and innovation, did indeed affect the following generation of bass players. By synthesizing the developments of the previous generations and mixing in his own fresh ideas, Ware served as the founder for a school of bassists that used his concepts to go on and develop their own individual voices.

²³⁸ Quoted in Wilmer, *Serious*, 29.

²³⁹ The Leaders Trio, *Heaven Dance*, Sunnyside SSC 1034D, 1989, compact disc.

²⁴⁰ Litweiler, "Remembering," 55.

APPENDIX ONE

TRANSCRIPTIONS

(all transcriptions done by the author)

Walter Page's Bassline to "Moten Swing" (1st Full Chorus)

August 8, 1940

♩ = 96

5

9

13

17

21

25

29

Wilbur Ware's Bassline to "Trinkle, Tinkle" (2nd Monk Chorus)

July, 1957

$\text{♩} = 80$

5

9

13

17

21

25

29

Paul Chamber's Solo on "Softly as in a Morning Sunrise" (1st Chorus)

May 19, 1957

$\text{♩} = 84$

3

5

9

13

17

21

25

29

Wilbur Ware's Solo on "Softly as in a Morning Sunrise" (1st Chorus)

November 3, 1957

$\text{♩} = 84$

5

9

13

17

21

25

29

APPENDIX TWO
ANNOTATED DISCOGRAPHY

aa	arco accompaniment
bbp	bass-body percussion
c	composition
id	introduction, drum accompaniment
ipd	introduction, piano and drum accompaniment
it	introduction, tutti accompaniment
iu	introduction, unaccompanied
m	melody
md	melody, drum accompaniment
mp	melody, piano accompaniment
mpd	melody, piano and drum accompaniment
mts	melody, tutti statement
sd	solo, drum accompaniment
sgd	solo, guitar and drum accompaniment
sp	solo, piano accompaniment
spd	solo, piano and drum accompaniment
st	solo, tutti accompaniment
su	solo, unaccompanied
tpd	tag, piano and drum accompaniment
tt	tag, tutti accompaniment
tu	tag, unaccompanied
wsd	walking solo, drum accompaniment
wsp	walking solo, piano accompaniment
wspd	walking solo, piano and drum accompaniment
wst	walking solo, tutti accompaniment

1938

9/15 **BIG BILL BROONZY**
Chicago Big Bill Broonzy (vocals & guitar), [probable personnel:] Mr. Sheiks (trumpet), Buster Bennett (alto sax), Blind John Davis (piano), unknown (guitar), Wilbur Ware (bass)

*** W.P.A. Rag**
Going Back to Arkansas

Broonzy, Big Bill. *Good Time Night*. Columbia CK 46219, 1990 (*Vocalion 04429, circa 1938). Compact disc.

1954

??/??
Chicago

JOHNNY GRIFFIN

Johnny Griffin (tenor sax), Junior Mance (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Buddy Smith (drums)

wspd

I Cried for You

sd

Satin Wrap

Yesterdays

c, mts, sd, tu

Riff-Raff

Bee-Ees

The Boy Next Door

These Foolish Things

wspd

Lollypop

Griffin, Johnny. *The Johnny Griffin Quartet*. MCA Victor Japan MVCR-20058, 1997 (ARGO-624, circa 1959). Compact disc.

1955

??/??
Chicago

SUN RA

Sun Ra (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass)

sp, aa

Can This Be Love?

Ra, Sun. *Standards*. 1201 Music 9019-2, 2000. Compact disc.

1956

6/25
New York
Kenny

ART BLAKEY

Donald Byrd (trumpet), Ira Sullivan (trumpet & tenor sax),

Drew (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Art Blakey (drums)

spd

The New Message

Blakey, Art. *The Jazz Messenger*. Columbia CK 47118, 1991 (mx CO. 56233, circa 1956). Compact disc.

8/22
New York

MATTHEW GEE
Matthew Gee (trombone), Ernie Henry (alto sax), Joe Knight
(piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Arthur Taylor (drums)

	Out of Nowhere
iu	I'll Remember April
	Joram
it	Sweet Georgia Brown
sd	Lover Man (Oh, Where Can You Be)

Gee, Matthew. *Jazz by Gee!* Riverside OJCCD-1884-2 (Riverside RLP 221, 1957). Compact disc.

8/25, 8/30
New York

ERNIE HENRY
Kenny Dorham (trumpet), Ernie Henry (alto sax), Kenny Drew
(piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Art Taylor (drums)

	Gone with the Wind
	Orient
wsd	Free Flight
sd	Checkmate
	Active Ingredients
	I Should Care
spd	Cleo's Chant

Henry, Ernie. *Presenting Ernie Henry.* Riverside OJCCD-1920-2, 1999 (RLP-222, 1956). Compact disc.

11/4
Hackensack

LEE MORGAN
Lee Morgan (trumpet), Clarence Sharpe (alto sax), Horace Silver
(piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Philly Joe Jones (drums)

	Gaza Strip
	Reggie of Chester
sd	Little T [aka "The New Message"]
sd	* Little T [aka "The New Message"] (alternate take)
wsd	Stand By
	Roccus
	The Lady

Morgan, Lee. *Lee Morgan Indeed!* Blue Note Japan TOCJ-9134, 1999 (BNLP-1538, 1957). Compact disc.

*Morgan, Lee. *The Complete Blue Note Lee Morgan Fifties Sessions*. Mosaic MD4-162, 1995. Compact disc box set.

12/13, 12/18
New York ZOOT SIMS
Nick Travis (trumpet), Jack "Zoot" Sims (alto* & tenor sax),
George Handy (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Osie Johnson
(drums)

sd	Why Cry?
	Echoes of You
sd, tu	* Swim, Jim
spd	Here and Now
	Fools Rush In
spd	* Osmosis
spd	Taking a Chance on Love

Sims, Zoot. *Zoot!* Riverside OJCCD-228-2, 1992 (RLP-228, 1956). Compact disc.

1957

2/??
New York KENNY DREW
Kenny Drew (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass)

	You Must Have Been a Beautiful Baby
	Lullaby of Broadway
	Jeepers Creepers
	I Only Have Eyes for You
	You're My Everything
	You'll Never Know
	You're Getting to Be a Habit with Me
tu	September in the Rain
	Come Rain or Come Shine
	That Old Black Magic
	Over the Rainbow
mp, mts	Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea
	As Long as I Live
	It's Only a Paper Moon
	Stormy Weather
	I've Got the World on a String
	Let's Fall in Love
	Blues in the Night

Get Happy

Drew, Kenny. *Kenny Drew Plays the Music of Harry Warren and Harold Arlen (A Harry Warren Showcase and A Harold Arlen Showcase)*. Milestone MCD-47070-2, 1995 (Judson 3004 and Judson 3005, 1957). Compact disc.

3/28
New York

KENNY DREW

Donald Byrd (trumpet), Hank Mobley (tenor sax), Kenny Drew (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), G. T. Hogan (drums)

spd

**This Is New
Carol**

iu

It's You or No One

4/3
New York
(bass),

KENNY DREW

Donald Byrd (trumpet), Kenny Drew (piano), Wilbur Ware

G. T. Hogan (drums)

spd

**You're My Thrill
Little T [aka "The New Message"]**

spd

Paul's Pal

Why Do I Love You?

Drew, Kenny. *This Is New*. Riverside OJCCD-483-2, 1992 (RLP-12-236, 1957). Compact disc.

4/16
New York

THELONIOUS MONK

John Coltrane (tenor sax), Thelonious Monk (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass)

Monk's Mood

Monk, Thelonious. *Thelonious Himself*. Riverside OJCCD-254-2, 1992 (RLP-235, 1957). Compact disc.

4/21
Hackensack

HANK MOBLEY

Donald Byrd (trumpet), John Jenkins (alto sax), Hank Mobley (tenor sax), Bobby Timmons (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Philly Joe Jones (drums)

spd

Fit for a Hanker

id, spd **Hi Groove, Low Feed-Back**
Easy to Love
Time After Time
Dance of the Infidels

Mobley, Hank. *Hank*. Blue Note Japan TOCJ-9185, 2000 (Blue Note BN 1560, 1957). Compact disc.

6/25
New York

THELONIOUS MONK
Ray Copeland (trumpet), Gigi Gryce (alto sax), John Coltrane (tenor sax), Coleman Hawkins (tenor sax), Thelonious Monk (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Art Blakey (drums)

sd **Crepuscule with Nellie (take 1)**
Crepuscule with Nellie (breakdown)

Monk, Thelonious. *Thelonious Monk: The Complete Riverside Recordings*. Riverside RCD-022-2, 1986. Compact disc box set.

Ray Copeland (trumpet), Gigi Gryce (alto sax), John Coltrane (tenor sax), Coleman Hawkins (tenor sax), Wilbur Ware (bass), Art Blakey (drums)

id, sd, bbp **Blues for Tomorrow**

Hawkins, Coleman. *Blues Wail: Coleman Hawkins Plays the Blues*. Prestige PRC-11006-2, 1996 (originally credited to "East Coast All-Stars" on *Blues for Tomorrow*, Riverside RLP-243, 1958). Compact disc.

6/26
New York

THELONIOUS MONK
Ray Copeland (trumpet), Gigi Gryce (alto sax), John Coltrane (tenor sax), Coleman Hawkins (tenor sax), Thelonious Monk (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Art Blakey (drums)

spd **Off Minor (take 4) [mono]**
spd *** Off Minor (take 4) [stereo]**
sd **Off Minor (take 5)**
aa **Crepuscule with Nellie (takes 4 and 5)**
aa **Crepuscule with Nellie (take 6) [mono]**
 *** Epistrophy (alternate)**
sd **Epistrophy**
sd **Well, You Needn't**

Coleman Hawkins (tenor sax), Thelonious Monk (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Art Blakey (drums)

Ruby, My Dear

Monk, Thelonious. *Monk's Music*. Riverside OJCCD-084-2, 1991 (RLP-1102, 1957). Compact disc.

*Monk, Thelonious. *Thelonious Monk with John Coltrane*. Jazzland JCD-46-2, 2000 (Riverside 9490, 1961). Compact disc.

7/??
New York

THELONIOUS MONK

John Coltrane (tenor sax), Thelonious Monk (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Shadow Wilson (drums)

Ruby, My Dear
Trinkle, Tinkle
Nutty

spd

Monk, Thelonious. *Thelonious Monk with John Coltrane*. Jazzland JCD-46-2, 2000 (Riverside 9490, 1961). Compact disc.

7/26
Hackensack

JOHN JENKINS/CLIFFORD JORDAN/BOBBY TIMMONS

John Jenkins (alto sax), Clifford Jordan (tenor sax), Bobby Timmons (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Dannie Richmond (drums)

Cliff's Edge

Tenderly

Princess

Soft Talk

Blue Jay

spd

wspd

id, wsd

Jenkins, John, Clifford Jordan, and Bobby Timmons. *Jenkins Jordan and Timmons*. Prestige/New Jazz OJCCD-251-2, 1994 (Prestige/New Jazz 8232, 1960). Compact disc.

8/12
New York

THELONIOUS MONK/GERRY MULLIGAN

Gerry Mulligan (baritone sax), Thelonious Monk (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Shadow Wilson (drums)

spd

sd

wst

Straight, No Chaser (take 1)

Straight, No Chaser (take 3)

Rhythm-A-Ning

(drums)

spd	Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered
	Do It the Hard Way
	I Didn't Know What Time It Was
	Happy Hunting Horn
id, tu	I Could Write a Book
spd	What Is a Man?
wsd	The Lady Is a Tramp

Drew, Kenny. *Pal Joey*. Riverside OJCCD-1809-2, 1992 (Riverside RLP-249, 1959). Compact disc.

10/16
New York

WILBUR WARE

John Jenkins (alto sax), Johnny Griffin (tenor sax), Junior Mance (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Wilbur Campbell (drums)

c, sd	Mamma-Daddy
	Desert Sands
c, mts, su, tt	31st and State
	Latin Quarters
	Be-Ware

John Jenkins (alto sax), Johnny Griffin (tenor sax), Wilbur Ware (bass), Wilbur Campbell (drums)

md, su	Lullaby of the Leaves
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Ware, Wilbur. *The Chicago Sound*. Riverside OJCCD-1737-2, 1992 (RLP 12-252, 1957). Compact disc.

11/3
New York

SONNY ROLLINS

Sonny Rollins (tenor sax), Wilbur Ware (bass), Elvin Jones (drums)

wst	I've Got You Under My Skin
	A Night in Tunisia (evening take)
iu, sd (2), tt	Softly as in a Morning Sunrise
	(alternate take)
	Four
sd	* Woody 'n' You
tu	Old Devil Moon

	What Is This Thing Called Love
id, sd (2), tt	* Softly as in a Morning Sunrise
sd	* Sonnymoon for Two
	* I Can't Get Started
	I'll Remember April
wst	Get Happy
st	* Striver's Row
sd	All the Things You Are
	Get Happy (short version)

Rollins, Sonny. *A Night at the Village Vanguard*. Blue Note 7243 4 99795 2 9, 1999 (*Blue Note BLP 1581, 1958; others first appeared on *More from the Vanguard*, BN LA475, 1975). 2 compact discs.

11/10
Hackensack

SONNY CLARK

Art Farmer (trumpet), Curtis Fuller (trombone), Hank Mobley (tenor saxophone), Sonny Clark (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Louis Hayes (drums)

spd, tu	Dial S for Sonny
	Bootin' It (mono take)
	Bootin' It (stereo take 5)
tpd	It Could Happen to You
	Sonny's Mood
	Shoutin' on a Riff

Sonny Clark (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Louis Hayes (drums)

Love Walked In

Clark, Sonny. *Dial "S" for Sonny*. Blue Note CDP 7243 8 56585 2 5, 1997 (BLP 1570, 1959). Compact disc.

11/18
New York

WILBUR WARE

John Jenkins (alto sax), Johnny Griffin (tenor sax), Junior Mance (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Frank Dunlop (drums)

id, mpd, sd	Body and Soul
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Johnny Griffin (tenor sax), Junior Mance (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Frank Dunlop (drums)

ipd, spd	The Man I Love
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Ware, Wilbur. *The Chicago Sound*. Riverside OJCCD-1737-2, 1992 (RLP 12-252, 1957). Compact disc.

12/2
New York

KENNY DORHAM
Kenny Dorham (trumpet), Ernie Henry (alto sax), Wilbur Ware (bass), G. T. Hogan (drums)

id, sd **Is It True What They Say About Dixie?**
wsd **Jazz-Classic**

Dorham, Kenny. *2 Horns/2 Rhythm*. Riverside OJCCD-463-2, 1990 (RLP-255, 1957). Compact disc.

12/30/57, 1/7/58
New York

JEAN THIELEMANS
Jean Thielemans (harmonica* and guitar+), Pepper Adams (baritone sax#), Kenny Drew (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Art Taylor (drums)

tt ***# East of the Sun**
 *** Don't Blame Me**
 + # 18th Century Ballroom
spd ***+ # Soul Station**
wsd ***# Fundamental Frequency**
 ***# Strutting with Some Barbecue**
 + Imagination
 ***# Isn't It Romantic**

Thielemans, Jean. *Man Bites Harmonica!* Riverside OJCCD-1738-2, 1992 (RLP-1125, 1958). Compact disc.

1958

2/25
New York
Adams

THELONIOUS MONK
Donald Byrd (trumpet), Johnny Griffin (tenor sax), Pepper

(baritone sax), Thelonious Monk (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Philly Joe Jones (drums)

sd **Coming on the Hudson**

Monk, Thelonious. *Thelonious Monk: The Complete Riverside Recordings*. Riverside RCD-022-2, 1986. Compact disc box set.

2/25
New York
Adams

JOHNNY GRIFFIN

Donald Byrd (trumpet), Johnny Griffin (tenor sax), Pepper

(baritone sax), Kenny Drew (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Philly
Joe Jones (drums)

sd **Stix' Trix**
id **What's New**
 Johnny G.G.
 Catharsis

Johnny Griffin (tenor sax), Kenny Drew (piano), Wilbur Ware
(bass), Philly Joe Jones (drums)

su **Woody'n You**

Griffin, Johnny. *Johnny Griffin Sextet*. Riverside OJCCD-1827-2, 1994 (RLP
12-264, 1958). Compact disc.

2/26, 2/27
New York

JOHNNY GRIFFIN

Johnny Griffin (tenor sax), Kenny Drew (piano), Wilbur Ware
(bass), Philly Joe Jones (drums)

spd **Where's Your Overcoat, Boy?**
sd **Hot Sausage**
sd **Sunny Monday**
 Cherokee
sd **Teri's Tune**
sd **Little John**

Griffin, Johnny. *Way Out!* Riverside OJCCD-1855-2, 1994 (RLP 12-274,
1958). Compact disc.

7/2, 7/3
New York

BLUE MITCHELL

Blue Mitchell (trumpet), Curtis Fuller (trombone), Johnny
Griffin (tenor saxophone), Wynton Kelly (piano), Wilbur Ware
(bass), Philly Joe Jones (drums)

sd **Blues March**
 Big Six
 Brother 'Ball
 Jamph

sd **Sir John
Promenade**

Blue Mitchell (trumpet), Wynton Kelly (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Philly Joe Jones (drums)

There Will Never Be Another You

Mitchell, Blue. *Big 6*. Riverside OJCCD-615-2, 1991 (RLP 12-273, 1958).
Compact disc.

1961

6/14. 6/15
New York

CLIFFORD JORDAN
Kenny Dorham (trumpet), Clifford Jordan (tenor saxophone),
Cedar Walton (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Albert "Tootie"
Heath (drums)

spd **Extempore**
Down Through the Years
Quittin' Time
One Flight Down
Mosaic
aa **Sunrise in Mexico**
Windmill

Clifford Jordan (tenor saxophone), Cedar Walton (piano), Wilbur Ware (bass), Albert "Tootie" Heath (drums)

Don't You Know I Care?

Jordan, Clifford. *Mosaic (Starting Time)*. Milestone MCD-47092-2, 2001
(Jazzland 52, circa 1961). Compact disc.

8/29
Englewood Cliffs

GRANT GREEN
Grant Green (guitar), Wilbur Ware (bass), Al Harewood (drums)

sgd **You Stepped Out of a Dream**
Love Walked In
If I Had You
If I Had You (Alt Tk)
sgd **I'll Remember April**
sgd, aa **You and the Night and the Music**

sgd, aa

**All the Things You Are
I Remember You**

Green, Grant. *Standards*. Blue Note CDP-21284, 1998 (Blue Note Japan, circa 1980). Compact disc.

1968

??/??

New York (?)

CHARLES MOFFETT

Charles Moffett (vocals*, trumpet+, vibraphone#, drums^), Paul Jeffrey (tenor saxophone~, alto clarinet@), Wilbur Ware (bass), Codaryl Moffett (drums=), Dennis O'Toole (drums%)

sd

#^~= Avant Garde Got Soul Too

wsd

#^~= Adnerb

iu

#@ The Gift

***+~% Blues Strikes Again**

aa, sd

#~@=% Yelrihs

Moffett, Charles. *The Gift*. Savoy SV-0217, 1993 (MG-12194, 1969). Compact disc.

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VITA

Karl Erik Haddock Seigfried was born in Evanston, Illinois, on March 8, 1973, the son of Professor Charlene Haddock Seigfried and Professor Hans Haddock Seigfried. He graduated from Evanston Township High School in 1990 as one of the top twenty students in his graduating class. He studied the bass with Bertram Turetzky at the University of California at San Diego, where he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts (Magna Cum Laude) in 1996 with a double major in Music Performance and English & American Literature. While enrolled at UCSD, he spent a semester in Rome, Italy, at Loyola University Chicago's Rome Campus. In 1999, he received the degree of Master of Music in Double Bass Performance from the University of Wisconsin at Madison, where he studied the bass with Richard Davis. In August 1999 he entered the Graduate School of the University of Texas to study the bass with Dr. David Neubert. Since first coming to the instrument, he has played in a wide variety of musical settings including symphony orchestras, wind ensembles, chamber groups, big bands, and small jazz groups. He has performed as a soloist in both classical and jazz settings and worked as the leader, composer, and arranger of his own ensembles.

Permanent Address: 2040 Hawthorne Lane, Evanston, Illinois 60201-3002

This treatise was typed by the author.