

RELATIONSHIP

Relationship is ubiquitous. Good, bad or indifferent, it is the air we breathe, the sunshine we seek and the gravity that grounds us. The condition of being human requires relationship. Germaine says it is “a theme that is central to the motivation and structure for the entire project.” The **CIRCLE** of notable jazz greats in North Philadelphia that included Odean Pope and Reggie Workman, represented relationship at its best. It was a rarified group of highly self-disciplined and talented young men who were bound together by making music. It was Reggie being teased by Philly Joe Jones on the 23 trolley (Jones was the first black conductor) because his bass was without a case. It was Reggie driving his friends and their instruments to gigs in his father’s hearse. It was Odean practicing everyday with Hasaan Ibn Ali and Coltrane. It was Hasaan Ibn Ali, the brilliant iconoclastic piano player, cutting his tie short bucking a dress requirement and it is still Reggie and Odean reminiscing about those times. It is the reverence heard from Odean when he repeatedly refers to “standing on shoulders.” In a circle of shared mutuality, the musical men influenced each other, many developing into great jazz masters. Some continue to perform and create into their eighties and nineties! The friendships remain golden. Jazz has always been interested in human relationships.

Historically, black people subjected to slavery, torture, dislocation and **motherless children** were able to develop one body of music. Jazz is an amalgamation formed by vital human needs, coming from the requirements for survival; survival with **dignity**, survival with **hope**, survival with **joy** and survival with **relationship!** A People can draw strength from the enduring art that links them to their past. It is a way to cope with unimaginable trauma. “Sometimes I feel like a Motherless Child,” exemplary as a spiritual, is simultaneously mournful and yet hopeful, embracing the possibility that ‘sometimes I **don’t** feel like a motherless child.’ Hope is inimitably human. No one survives without hope! Hope strengthens the spirit. Resilient people with hope have capacity for joy. How do people transcend a history stained by injustice? “Art is the axe that breaks the frozen sea within us.” (Kafka) What happens when the most vital of relationships is gone? Music can become an interlocking connection.

An existential aspect of the human condition when relationship is lacking is the bottomless well of loneliness to which everyone falls vulnerable and the receptivity to be elevated by music. Severing mother and child from each other during times of holocaust is one of man’s cruelest intentions. It is blight upon our Country’s racial history, our current immigration disaster and in other world arenas. Because disappointment is built into relationships, however, everyone can be a ‘motherless child’ even if temporarily and if not harrowing in magnitude. Lucky children who have ‘good enough’ mothers are inoculated to the inevitable disenchantments of life through experiencing the imperfections in their first caretakers; the temporary moodiness, detachments, insensitivities, perceived betrayals because of new siblings, etc.. Less fortunate children are subjected to mothers or caretakers with severe deficiencies, defects, flaws and excessive limitations. Instead of lasting love, they are left feeling bereft in the world. The suffering can be silent, strident or thunderous. I think of Frank Conroy again and his novel **Body and Soul**. The protagonist could have been a desolate child had he not

used his innate talents to capture music, jazz in particular, to nourish and save his soul.

One can feel so alone in a busy world! Claude is wrong, however. Music nourishes his heart, filling his world with **technicolor** intensity. The novel is dazzling in depicting a progressive all-embracing of music in place of a rejecting, hateful mother. First the forlorn boy sees the shiny brass instruments in the store window almost as totems. He plays scales on the piano when his mother is cruel to him, advancing the substitution. Eventually, music becomes a substitution for his mother, in that his needs are met. Music becomes the idealized mother, the love that rarely disappoints, who he can, in return, lavish his beseeching and rapture. I've gone on this tangent to demonstrate how the fictionalized account of Claude's relationship with jazz is, in microcosm, one aspect of how and why music was so imperative to the fractured and grief-stricken slaves. The music became a 'transitional object,' a repository of mother-love to hold onto when families were torn apart. A People's music creates strong emotional bonds that can sustain attachments and fortify survival during generational crises. Slaves humming the blues to themselves is a tangible example of 'holding onto and inside' necessary sustenance to keep them going. Ellington's treasured **Mood Indigo** echoes everyone's deep loneliness. It is an anthem to loneliness, but with haunting beauty, not self-pity. When Billie Holiday, an archetypal motherless child, sings Ellington's **In My Solitude**, she is singing to that part of everyone. The generational thread is made of steel.

Relationship was evident on the Thursday of Reggie Workman's residency with the PLC. I walked through a gray steel door, past a video studio, up an unassuming flight of stairs that opened to a surprising space. The room could have been a farmhouse in a pastoral setting. The cathedral ceiling was made of wide planked wood with beams and spotlights. Plenty of natural sunlight poured through the overhead skylights. This was my first visit to Rittenhouse Soundworks on the very block where I had once lived in Germantown. The magic, however, came from the warmth emanating from the many Philadelphia jazz musicians centered around Odean and Reggie. There was Lee Smith, Craig McIver, Tom Lawton, Diane Monroe, Monnette Sudler, Marilyn Smith, Joe Sudler, Terry Lawson, Robert Landon, Farrid Barron and several other musicians who were gathered to listen and/or play. Voices from the past infiltrated the room, the musicians channelling their continuing legacy. The day before at WRTI with J. Michael Harrison, Odean talked about how important it was when he was young to get together several times a week with his musical pals to play together, highlighting the importance of relationship in addition to practicing alone. Next, poet Herman Beavers moderated a discussion with Reggie. Jazz has been an ambassador to the world. Reggie pointed out that more people attended Louis Armstrong's funeral than JFK's.

I've long thought about the psychological role that Louis Armstrong played for our country as well as for the world. There could be no better example of how art, music, jazz and a kind mentor affected an individual to thrive exponentially to become one of jazz' greatest icons and the Country's foremost ambassador of love, joy, democracy and relationship, than **Louis Armstrong**. "If you don't like Louis Armstrong, you don't know how to love." (Mahalia Jackson) **Louis Armstrong, Satchmo, Pops!** Not only do jazz aficionados consider him to be the king of jazz innovation and musicianship, but his humanistic character transcended the deprivations of his early life. Could the

endearment, '**Pops**' have presented him as a munificent father to all? He began using the nickname himself to people whose names he could not remember. Was it also an adaptive psychological maneuver to seek the pop he never had while also providing a pop for everyone else? One musician, Bunny Bergen said, "All you need to stay on the road is a toothbrush and a photograph of Louis Armstrong." Louis had a compassionate father figure, Mr. Karnofsky, who treated him as a boy with dignity. Louis formed a strong attachment to the Karnofsky family. He said, "When I reached the age of eleven I began to realize it was the Jewish family who instilled in me singing from the heart." This can especially be heard when Louis sings about 'home' such as his signature song, "**Sleepy Time Down South**," the home of his heart or "**Home Sweet Home**." He wore a Star of David to honor the Karnofskys until his death. He said that he developed "scat" singing not just because he forgot the words to **Heebie-Jeebies** but it also reminded him of davening (Jewish praying and swaying) that he would hear from Mr. Karnofsky. Louis called it "Jews' rockin.'

Fatherless children are but a variant of motherless children. For Pops, to give what he had been so harshly dispossessed of, a pop, was of the highest order of getting. How did Pops connect at such a visceral level with so many people from so many different cultures? Music is the one cultural elixir with the power to stir so bone deep. Armstrong's music is complex but his presentation was dominated by ebullience and humility. His message was about love. **Pops** had remarkable rapport with his audience. It wasn't just sweat he needed his white handkerchief to mop. It was love and tears exuding from him and his audiences felt it. As jazz is emblematic of the Black American experience, Louis Armstrong epitomizes the qualities intrinsic to jazz: the highest artistic aesthetic at a cultural level, the resilience with dignity of a People and the transcendence of a severely harsh childhood at a personal level. Odean Pope and the other older musicians in the PLC are also engaged in the highest form of giving to the next generation of musicians.

Many shoulders are being stood upon. Buddy Bolden, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, John Coltrane, Dizzy Gillespie and so many more jazz innovators are immortal. Odean and Reggie have devoted their musical careers to advancing and continuing the unique legacy of Philadelphia jazz that flourished in the inspired circle.