



THE POOR PRINT



Damn! That's Crunchy: Very Brief Thoughts on Dissonance in Jazz

Josh Cottell

*J*sit down at the piano and play two chords. It's a C^{7(b9)} leading to a FΔ^(add9). Damn! That's crunchy.

Hearing these chords would make many think immediately of jazz. But why? What is it about these chords that makes us think of jazz? The answer to this question is in the essence of the chords themselves, their harmonic makeup, if you will. Behind any interesting harmonic pattern, there is one feature that truly defines the style of a piece: dissonance. Originally meaning the suspension and resolution of a non-consonant interval, dissonance is a concept that has been used from as early as the 16th Century right up to the present day, in increasingly varied ways.

In the early 20th Century, when jazz was moving to the forefront of the popular music world, dissonance continued to be explored. The additions of sixths and sevenths to common harmony provided an increasingly wide variety of opportunity for musical colour. Even in the early days of Dixieland with the likes of Louis Armstrong and Jelly Roll Morton, these enhanced chord changes can be heard. But these additions are not just used randomly and fleetingly - each is still used carefully, and to great effect. Voice-leading plays a huge part in the formation of a correctly working

accompaniment, and the dissonances still often follow the original rules of the 16th Century - you can't just add a note in willy-nilly and 'jump around'. Of course, the clarity of these dissonances differs between jazz and early music - but that does not mean the thoughts behind them are not the same.

'But Josh,' I hear you ask, 'Surely some of these ideas are just as common in later classical music?' (And if you didn't ask that, you're going to get an answer anyway.)

Well, you are technically right. The perhaps more commonly known classical examples of dissonance come from serialism, a genre popularised by composers such as Schoenberg, Webern and Berg. Their use of dissonance stood out among early 20th-Century composers for its almost unrestricted nature. (The fact that it was very restricted indeed is another matter entirely.) Going even further back in time, one can think of impressionist composers such as Debussy who again used ideas that rejected traditional Western harmony. If one listens to this music, there are definite similarities between the additive harmonies used here and that those found in your favourite jazz standards.

But again, we ask ourselves: 'Why?' The answer is that all these composers, whether they be Debussy, Schoenberg, Gershwin or anyone in between, were all trying to create one thing: tonal colour. These colours, of course, vary dramatically across styles of

writing, but to create the colours, dissonance had be used more freely.

The use of the concept in jazz goes beyond just the simple harmonic ideas you see in the chord symbols. Soloists are there because they want to stand out; they want to show off; they want to create interest. The way that they often do so is through dissonance. When done well, this can create some of the grooviest licks there are - just listen to some John Coltrane and you'll get the picture.

People (often naively) say that 'in jazz there are no such thing as wrong notes', but there is always a point where too much dissonance or too little knowledge of dissonance can make for a rather unenjoyable listening experience. That said, too little dissonance at all just makes the music sound bland. For pianists, who often repeat the same chord sequence, there is a point of mind-numbing boredom. This is where the good-old sixths, sevenths, ninths, eleventh etc come in handy to create that authentic jazz sound. You never know, they might just throw in a tritone substitution to get the rhythm section really raving.

I think the key point I'm trying to make is that dissonance is part of the essence of jazz. It is deep within the heart and soul of what the genre is and, without it, you would not get the sound you look for when you click on that 'Jazz vibes' playlist on your Spotify.■



A Tale of Two Halves: A Review of 'Twelfth Night'

Chloe Whitehead

*F*ive English students, a medic and some wholesome Shakespeare - a day out made in heaven? We thought so.

On a rainy Thursday in January we went to see *Twelfth Night* at the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon, and on the whole witnessed a brilliant performance. Despite being an English student, I'd actually never seen Shakespeare at the theatre, and my first experience was not disappointing.

The RSC's *Twelfth Night* - directed by Christopher Luscombe - breathes and exudes dissonance. Dissonant identities, romances and professional relationships permeate every aspect of this production. For those of you unaware of the plot of *Twelfth Night*, here's a quick summary (minus huge spoilers): shipwrecked, alone, and grieving for her supposedly dead twin brother on the shores of the foreign land Illyria, Viola becomes a

servant of the dashing Duke Orsino. Yet to do so she must dress as a man and adopt the name Cesario, resulting in a complicated double life. Orsino is in love with the beautiful yet elusive Olivia, a guarded noblewoman in prolonged mourning. But when Cesario travels to Olivia's country mansion to woo her on the Duke's behalf, Olivia instead falls in love with Cesario, unaware she is the disguised Viola. An intricate - and often humorous - love triangle ensues, heightened further when Cesario falls in love with the debonair, unaware Duke. This is paralleled by the tension existing between Malvolio - Olivia's steward - and her other employees, as well as the fortunes of the mysterious Sebastian, a young man remarkably resembling Viola and mourning his twin sister following a tragic shipwreck...

Ingeniously, the RSC have decided to stage this version of the production in a late-Victorian context, giving it a relatively colonial feel as the two 'outsiders'

into Illyrian society - are dressed in traditional Indian costumes. In fact, all characters were impeccably well dressed, from uptight Victorian gentlemen to the luxuriously decadent dandy; Karen Large, the costume supervisor, deserves considerable credit for her creations.

Yet it was also the incredibly high standard of acting that allowed the costumes to become part of the world of Shakespeare. Nicholas Bishop as Orsino was as witty, self-centred and handsome as he should be, and Kara Tointon as Olivia gave a wonderful performance as the typical Victorian noblewoman. Dinita Gohil and Esh Alladi (as Viola and Sebastian respectively) put forward admirably authentic character portrayals, though it was certainly John Hodgkinson and Michael Cochrane as Olivia's hilariously eccentric uncle and deluded suitor that really stole the show. The play is, ultimately, a comedy, and they provided excellently timed comic relief that displayed their clear wealth of theatrical experience.

The actors' interaction with the set was equally good, though its use for comic purposes occasionally risked being a little too slapstick. Designer Simon Higlett created plentifully arranged sets that often provided an interesting background to the main plot, from a railway station, to polished country house gardens, to the intimacy of Orsino's bedroom.

Unexpectedly (for me at least) the play was remarkably musical, containing short instrumental motifs between scenes and a charming (albeit cheesy) dance number at the end. Interestingly, the music was played live, though the orchestra was unseen by the audience and only visible through a small monitor from certain angles (one of which my seat occupied). Composer Nigel Hess and Music Director John Woolf did, however, produce notable compositions that enriched the performance.

Although the play began in darkness, with merely an eerie lantern to illuminate the stage, the production ensured an entertaining and enlightening evening

showcasing the complex society of Illyria, and indeed of all humanity. There was also, to a degree, a lack of resolution by the performance's end, leaving numerous ambiguities in the manner Shakespeare likely intended. The inherent dissonance of identity remained the central and lasting intrigue.

Considering that the entire trip - performance, transport, and visit to the RSC's accompanying Shakespeare exhibition - cost around £20, it was a brilliant few hours outside the 'Oxford bubble'. The RSC runs these cheap trips specifically aimed at students for numerous performances throughout the year, and I would highly recommend booking one for a short break from the madness. Though the performance was at times overly cheesy and a little slow, it was ultimately a commendable show by cast and crew alike. The too-often dissonant spheres of academia and pleasure fused nicely in this dramatic outing, proving Shakespeare (once again) right: If music (or indeed theatre) be the food of love, play on.■

Washing Cycles

Aaron Cawood

The rhythmic hum of the washing machine
reminds me that not all metronomes are perfect
and that water smells like flowers sometimes
and that sometimes it smells like mud
and that you are still in the room.

You sent me teardrops in damp envelopes
and poems you didn't write.
And I realised your voice doesn't sound like the wind
through leaves anymore,
but I am not allowed to miss that -
or the aftertaste.

So, I stare back at the whirlwind box in the corner,
dripping with sweat water,
as I breathe in its shaking sound.

You look to me like I should say something.

I do not.

You only miss the sky when there's a ceiling,
only miss the horizon when there's a wall
and I only miss you when there's a flaw.

I shudder electrically,
and you move to warm me with blanket arms.

I step back again
and tell myself that emotions are not books and I cannot trust them.
I cannot read what you're thinking
but know that it tastes bitter.
I sip the sugar of the sound of rain and turn back to the corner.

There comes a point where each lost boy is just a boy.

The washing machine beeps.
Hazy silence drops to the floor
and a cold door handle begs one of us to leave.
I don't recall what happened next.
Only that now, I'm alone.

The Sound of Instability

Lauren Hill

Dissonance pervades our world. Tensions and conflict can tear apart the perceived stability of our lives, shifting harmony and order into a harsh cacophony of sound. In relation to psychology, cognitive dissonance can be explained as the inner mental conflict which results from simultaneously holding contradictory and incongruous beliefs; in order to preserve stability and balance in our conceptions of the world and ourselves, these differences must be reconciled. In music, while we may often think of dissonance as jarring, the reality of it is a subtler concept.

Dissonance has always been an integral part of our musical culture as it contributes to the power of music to express intense and profound emotion. It is those wonderful moments of suspended dissonance, where tension builds and resolves onto the anticipated chord, which breathe the life into the music. Take for example the distinctive, chromatic dissonance of the Tristan chord from Wagner's 'Prelude' to *Tristan und Isolde* which is left unresolved, prolonging the poignant sense of pain and yearning. Or the impressionistic dissonance of Debussy which is essential in his creation of such vivid colours and sound worlds. At times, dissonance can sound extremely harsh and discordant: think of the pulsing chords of Stravinsky's 'Dance of the Adolescents' from *The Rite of Spring* which sparked so much outrage at its 1913 premiere.

However, dissonance (and its inevitable resolution) is also found balanced in the Classical aesthetics of Mozart's music. The use of tension and its release has been an important part of music throughout all time, although the freer approach to disso-

nance is a relatively modern development: around the turn of the twentieth century, alongside the rise of modernism and expressionism across all the arts, dissonance in music took a new direction. Schoenberg's infamous concept of the 'emancipation of the dissonance' demanded that we 'free' music from the restrictions of traditional, hierarchical harmony. The birth of a new, modern musical language and his twelve-tone technique of serialist musical composition indelibly marked music history. Composers since then have responded to this in different ways.

Perhaps dissonance is something intrinsic to human perception: the reason why some harmonic intervals are deemed consonant and others dissonant can be explained to some extent by mathematical ratios of the frequencies of pitches. Yet our perceptions of dissonance can also be a deeply subjective experience, or something which is shaped by our shared cultural memory. Fundamentally, a dissonant chord sounds unstable and fragile; it demands to be resolved. This very same dissonance (or 'disagreement in sound') which seems like harsh, discordant noise strives to be resolved into harmony, beauty and order.

In this way, if there is dissonance and chaos, there is also fullness of life. Without its existence, it could be argued that it would be impossible to fully appreciate moments of perfect consonance and harmony between ourselves and the world: the way the morning sunlight illuminates the glistening beauty of Oxford and its dreaming spires; warm evenings spent with friends; and that vague, indescribable feeling that, despite the fragility and uncertainty of the future, everything will somehow be okay, just as the sound of instability will resolve into consonant harmony.■

The Poor Print Online

Check out our online exclusives this week, featuring:

Ciar McCormick: *To My Dearest Readers Three*

Amanda Higgin: *The Sound of Sheer Silence, Beautiful Thing: A Review*

Emma Gilpin: *Meme Analysis: Expectation vs Reality*

Michael Leong: *Dissonance Management*

Pleasant Discord

Michael Angerer

T it seems that the most desirable thing to achieve in life is harmony – that is, at least according to many religions and a sizeable number of personal coaches. Your life is supposed to run along like a well-crafted symphony: all dissonances are to be resolved at the end. That is also the principle at work in biographies and autobiographies, in history books and all kinds of other texts: superimpose a tight narrative structure on it, and your chaotic life might even make sense. As in a good detective story, every little detail that you cannot safely ignore is eventually made to fit. The problem with this kind of approach is that the human capacity for understanding is sadly limited; trying to fit everything – new pieces of information on Facebook, Twitter, news alerts – into your view of the world will result in the perfect echo chamber: an echo chamber inside your head.

Of course, it is just so much easier to think of events as happening in a clearly structured way: with a beginning, an end and a storyline in between. For example, disjointed episodes and incongruous facts can conveniently be arranged around a central figure – a figure like the heroes of the epics of old, or a figure like Caesar or Napoleon. They are crucial to our understanding of the world as populated by stories. In a sense, the novels of Fielding, Dickens or Balzac are only more elaborate examples of this primal need for a centralised structure: they lead us on into a complex world full of apparently unrelated characters, but at the end of the journey all of these narrative strands are ingeniously tied back together into a satisfying bow. As readers of reality, we act no differently, making each memorable fact we encounter a part of the story as we look back upon it.

The pretension to explain everything is probably what makes crime fiction so appealing: in a world of inexplicable

horrors and dysfunctional relationships, we can find a voice of reason restoring narrative order. The so-called golden-age detective novel has allowed Agatha Christie to rival Shakespeare and the Bible in popularity: the total number of sales of her 85 books is estimated to range between two and four billion. In such narratives, detectives – whether Hercule Poirot or Miss Marple – act almost explicitly as authors: they examine different events, include different voices and redact and edit different episodes in order eventually to present a fully coherent story. Such claims to universal knowledge and understanding have, of course, often been challenged, from the sprawling literary joke that is *Tristam Shandy* to the more recent *nouveau roman* and poststructuralist thought; but none of these have achieved the cultural supremacy accorded to simpler narratives. Even if it seems quite banal to say so, humans are conditioned to make sense of everything they encounter – but this may turn out to be a dangerous habit.

Now, the social phenomenon that is the 'echo chamber' has been widely discussed in the context of the current political situation: we alternatively blame the far right, the far left, Facebook, or any news network of our choosing for creating echo chambers where dissenting opinions are drowned out to create a single harmonious narrative. In the wake of divisive events like the 2016 vote for Brexit, the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States, and the increasing radicalisation of political discourse on the Continent, commentators like to stress how important it is to draw your information from diverse (and, indeed, discordant) sources; Facebook has again pledged to combat the spread of fake news among its users. But throwing the term 'echo chamber' around to explain cognitive dissonance does not change the fact that this is really an unavoidable part of the human condition: however well informed we are, however diverse our sources may be, information is still unified and rationalised inside our head. Both by dismissing and by rationalising

opposing views, we try to be the author, the detective in our own lives: neatly fitting divergent opinions into our story of things as they should be.

Not only does this sort of thing simply not work; it also creates further rifts in society as opposing parties alternatively claim the moral high ground over those who supposedly accept facts without questioning them: they are lovingly called 'sheeple', a wonderful word that, incidentally, has been in use since at least the 1940s – the phenomenon is not new. Occasionally, it seems it is not so trite as you may think to say: no one has a monopoly on the truth. The vital thing to remember at all times is that we cannot claim to understand everything that is going on; if we could, we would have sorted this mess out by now. By all means do read up on different sources and divergent opinions; but be aware that there will always be some things that lie beyond the limits of your understanding. Why not treat life like Sterne's *Tristam Shandy* or Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*: you are welcome to read it, enjoy it, interpret certain parts and formulate different hypotheses – and still, you will always be left with an ever changeable cock and bull story that defies comprehension. Rationalising every little bit away into a linear narrative will only ruin the fun for everyone.

There is naturally a certain irony in writing this very article, trying to make sense of the fact that one need not make sense of everything. It is true that narratives are important for the way we understand texts, history, philosophy and, most mysterious of all, other people; it is equally true that it is useful to recognise the existence of many different narratives so you can properly argue your point. But it is just as important to be aware that, just like this article, your point nevertheless remains incorrigibly subjective, trapped forever in the world you know. Not all dissonances can conveniently be resolved in the grand finale; you might as well enjoy them.■

Mind's Eye

Tom Saer

*Please, my deer, sell your tiger's hides and Harvest my empathy
I promise it's worth it?*

In an anxious Greek murmur of the brazen-clad I found your stone antlers Weeping words from a cherry tree

*In a fucking dance
I will grind you into a paste*

I've met you before synthesised waltz in a corridor Those times are oceans away now

This happens to me too often Stay timid

Taste my voice and the fate of my nation I see your sadness too *It sounds like chlorine to me double-tongued and Tyrian*

'On the blacksmith's canvas are maps of the mountainsides wreathed in sand' – by the stormfather?

The doorbell sounds Reminding me of a pledge to the garden shear and a microwaveable meal and one more pilgrimage to Sainsbury's

ahah, who knew that making soup would be so Sisyphean? *...Let me go to fucking bed*

The snowstorm And the sacred visage of a man waiting to die Finally instigated change inside me

I happen to this too often *I happen to this too often*

Ad Extremis – The Call

James Page

Beyond the tumbling hills, the great storm brewed on the horizon. Katherine found it mesmerising: its devastating vastness, the way it twisted and changed from moment to moment, the flickering light from within it flashing and fading. There was something strangely calming about its intricacies, despite the inevitable destruction it contained.

She had found herself spending more and more time gazing into it since her husband had passed. The philosophical part of her mind had frequently commented on how this behaviour was telling of a desire for destructionism in a world now becoming seemingly devoid of meaning, and then the rest told that part of her mind to silence itself, and to let her deal with her grief in her own time. Besides, that would only really be true if it was something new she could latch onto, but the storm had been on the horizon for years, always threatening but never daring closer. Even before they could see it, there had been tales and accounts from the heartlands of dark clouds brewing, threatening to destroy a wicked land grown too powerful under corrupt rulers. But Katherine knew the truth of all that: People could make up meaning for such disasters, but time always found a way to end anything that was supposed to last, regardless of its merit.

She had been staring from behind her home for some time now, trying to find new meaning in the plumes, when something changed. A red light flickered into view, low on the horizon. For a moment, Katherine thought that the storm had grown a mouth, finally deciding to tell forth its judgement on the land below; but then she realised the light was not coming from the storm, but the Western

road. A rider was approaching from the heartlands.

A tolling bell rang out behind her, summoning everyone to the village courtyard. Others had seen the light too.

Soon enough the whole village was gathered under the bell tower at the western gates, awaiting their new arrival. Many were worried; others, excited. Lauren, Katherine's overly eager neighbour, couldn't help but speculate.

'Who do you think it might be?'

'I have no idea.' Katherine was less keen to ponder. 'We shall simply have to wait until they arrive.'

'Perhaps it's a call to war.'

'Against who?' retorted Katherine. The only dissonance in the heartlands in her lifetime had been the storm, and since its arrival such petty squabbles had hardly been worth a second thought.

'Who's to say? But whatever news they bring: when the call comes it must be answered.'

This phrase was a popular one in the community, and one Katherine had not had much time for of late. She simply nodded and looked back to the road. Before Lauren could pipe up again, the rider emerged from behind the final hill.

In the diminishing light of day, the lamp the horse carried punctured the darkness before them. At first, all anyone could see beyond the light was the outline of a horse and a shimmering silver on top, reflecting the weaving flame. As the horse drew closer, and the crowd made way, they started to see the figure in detail:

'A knight,' stated one keen-eyed observer, and, much to the surprise of those gathered around him, he was right. The figure was now clearly armour-clad, and as the horse slowed to a trot before them they could pick out emblems and crests

on the damp fabric in which it was draped. The man and his steed shone of nobility, a quality the village had rarely before witnessed. Katherine started to think that maybe Lauren was right. Perhaps this was a call to some war of the great houses.

Then the knight slid off his horse and slammed into the earth below.

Lying on the bed before her, out of his armour and tended to by four trained healers, Katherine made note that the man had no distinctly noble quality to him. They had brought him here out of the night after he had collapsed, and Katherine had forced her way in after them. She had a powerful force of will and, these days, few were inclined to deny her something as harmless as a back seat to proceedings.

His chest and arms were rinsed purple with bruises, and the only distinctive item he now wore was the small green stone that hung around his neck. They had tried to take it off him, but each time they had tried he had started tossing and turning so violently that they were forced to stop. Katherine kept getting lost in the distortions of the jewel he wore. There was something about it that reminded her of the chaotic beauty of the storm. The knight had been muttering the same two things for the last hour or so: 'Joanna' and 'Failed'.

Just as her mind began wondering that way a third time, the man shuddered and coughed, and his eyes slowly began to open.

'Where,' he drowsily managed, 'Am I?' There was a moment's hesitation in the room, as people groped for an answer, and then realisation dawned in his eyes. 'I need to go ba—'

He didn't manage to complete his thought. Trying to sit up had reignited his map of bruises, and he fell immediately back down, moaning. One of the men at his bedside tried to calm him, 'You can't be going anywhere just yet. You've got a

lot of healing to do before going within a mile of that horse of yours.'

'I have to,' he mumbled, seeming to slip into semi-consciousness. 'My wife. She needs help. The storm. Please.'

The knight caught her eye with this last phrase, and in them she recognised something she herself had been feeling for months now. She knew what she had to do, and with a smirk she whispered to herself: 'When the call comes it must be answered.'

She stepped up to the anguished knight and put her hand on his shoulder. 'We will see to your wife. I promise you.'

He looked up into her eyes, his brown on her blue, and with perfect clarity told her: 'Take the stone to her. Take it to Crofton's seat.'

'I will,' and without a struggle, she lifted the stone off his neck. As he drifted back to sleep, she slipped quietly from the room.

Lauren found her some hours later in the village courtyard with the knight's horse.

'What on earth are you doing? Where are you going?'

'I have a promise to keep,' Katherine declared as she climbed onto the horse. She had learned to ride as a girl, but the years were a gulf of lost elements, and she hoped that this skill was not one of them. 'Make sure to keep my affairs in order while I am gone. I do not intend to return to a looted home.'

'And if you don't return at all? Katherine, please, this is madness. Why would you ride into the storm?'

But even she did not know that. She only knew that it had called her, and that she could no longer ignore it. She spurred on her new companion, the nameless horse, as her old companion called out in final protest behind her.

They advanced together beyond the gates of the village, and rode towards the beckoning darkness.■