

My Haunted Heart:  
The Polemic Nature of Jazz and Race, or  
My Bill Evans Problem, a Response to Eugene Holley

I was studying for an undergraduate music history exam when I fell asleep on the floor. A boombox rested beside me. A local jazz radio station, WBGO, was playing. I was shocked from my slumber as I exclaimed, “What the hell was that?” Perhaps, if I was fully conscious, I would have provided a more eloquent response. The issue wasn’t *what* was that, but *who* was that. The answer was...Bill Evans. The album was *Everybody Digs Bill Evans* and the tune was the sublime, yet earth-shattering, “Peace Piece.” This was my discovery of Bill Evans and I knew, from that point forward, I needed to learn everything possible about him and his music.

In the Fall of 2001, I entered the Master of Arts program at Rutgers University for Jazz History and Research. Admittedly, as an undergraduate at Rutgers who studied classical music history and theory, I had a scant knowledge of jazz and the cultural capital put forth by the African American community. This would change immediately. I was hurled into the deep waters of the slave songs: the field hollers, the work songs, and the spirituals. So, as Eugene Holley posited in his astute article, “My Bill Evans Problem: Jaded Visions of Jazz and Race” from 2013, “What was the problem?” For Holley, it was his internal reconciliation with being a black man who was drawn to the music, “It was Bill Evans’s love of, and application of, European classical styles, approaches, and motifs into jazz that was so attractive to my ears, as evidenced by the... the intoxicating melodicism of “Israel” from *Explorations*.” For me, I quickly realized that as a young, middle-class, white man, I knew very little of the historical underpinnings that made jazz possible...