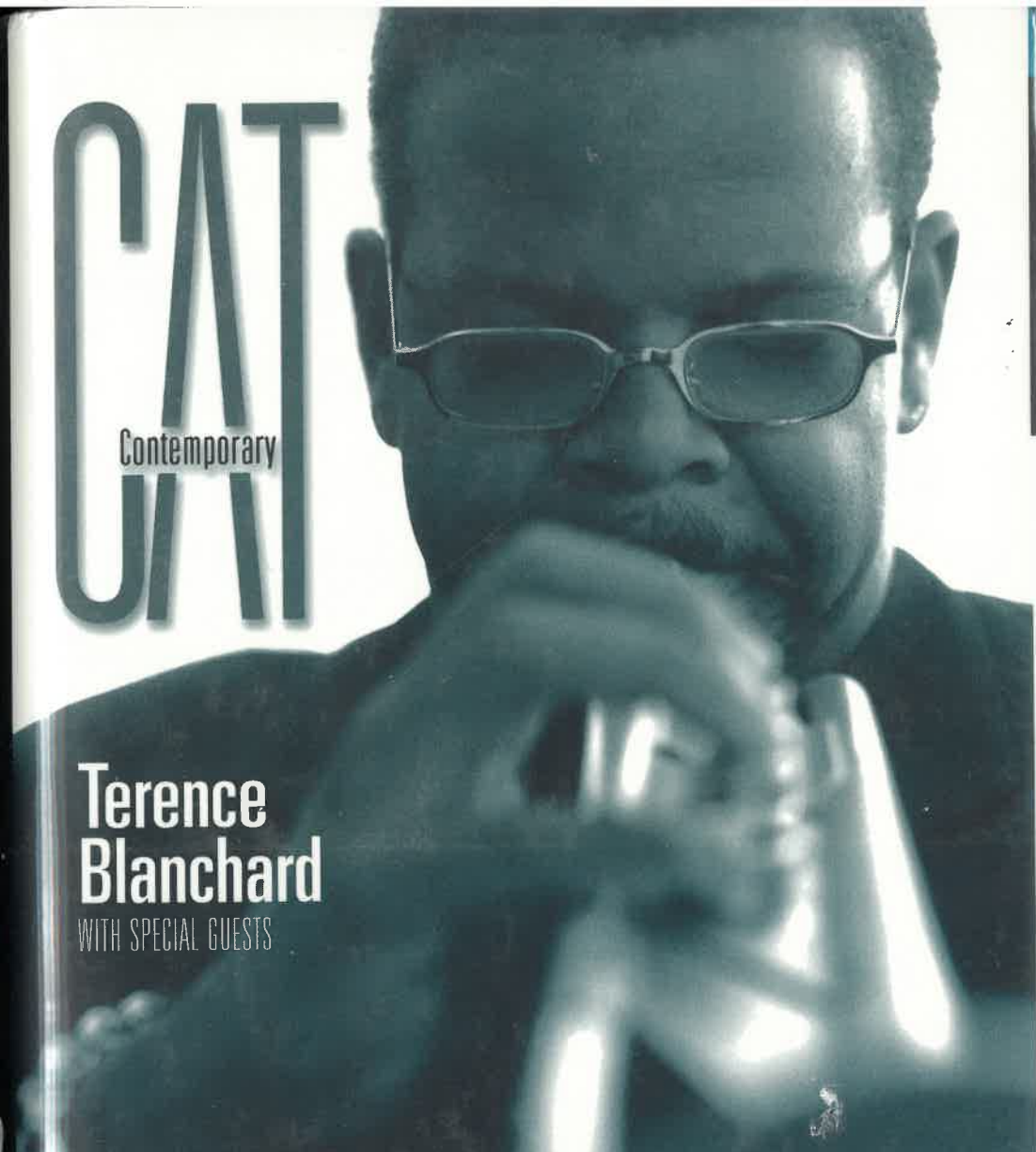


CONTEMPORARY CAT

CAT

Contemporary



Terence Blanchard

WITH SPECIAL GUESTS



SCARECROW PRESS PRESENTS "CONTEMPORARY CAT: TERENCE BLANCHARD WITH SPECIAL GUESTS"

FEATURING DRANFORD MARSALIS DONALD HARRISON EDWARD SIMON CARL ALLEN MULGREW MILLER JOE HENDERSON

CYRUS CHESTNUT NICHOLAS PAYTON CHRISTIAN MCBRIDE BENNY GOLSON DAVE HOLLAND

GRUSIN KASI LEMMONS WITH SPIKE LEE

ONY MACRO

HOUSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY



"Terence Blanchard is a very gifted musician and a good role-model for musicians coming up today. I'm one of his biggest fans. Whenever I see him play or when I hear one of his movie scores, it just makes me feel very proud." —**Sonny Rollins**

"For those of us who have been on the scene for a long time, we're always very proud to see a young talented gentleman like Terence come on the scene." —**Clark Terry**

"Terence was a big influence on all of us. He and Wynton Marsalis were probably the two biggest idols of all the high school jazz musicians in the mid- and late 1980s." —**Christian McBride**

"Terence is the man! He's one of my favorites. The thing I love about Terence is that he has his own style, his own voice. It's a very personal sound with great dexterity." —**Roy Hargrove**

"Terence has this wonderful warmth to his sound, which reflects his character too. And I have a great admiration for his writing abilities, not only with his group, but with the scores that he's written for film." —**Dave Holland**

"Terence brings another sensibility to the field [of film scoring], and I think he does a great job." —**Wynton Marsalis**

"Terence is out there writing those movie scores for Spike Lee and others and I think it's great—and he's great at it!" —**J.J. Johnson**

"I'm very honored that I've been able to work with Terence and have a true collaboration. He's very important to my filmmaking. Terence's music fills in the holes and lifts it up to another level." —**Spike Lee**

"Terence is a killer trumpet player, a great musician, composer and arranger. He does everything and he does it well!" —**Ray Brown**

Contemporary Cat

*Terence Blanchard
with Special Guests*

Anthony Magro

Studies in Jazz, No. 42



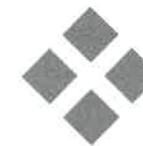
The Scarecrow Press, Inc.
Lanham, Maryland, and Oxford
and
Institute of Jazz Studies
Rutgers—The State University of New Jersey
2002

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

patience; to Neil J. Price for his help in launching this project; to Lee Cash for always being in my corner; and to Jason Stephens for his open ear and helpful suggestions.

Finally, and especially, I am beholden to Terence. His giving personality and astonishing artistry intersected with my inspiration. I thank him for an experience I will forever treasure.

PREFACE



Still high on the music, a few people drift to the bar for last call, but mostly everyone has gone home by now. The band is on the road in Toronto near the end of their Canadian sweep. They are performing songs from their best-selling new album, a tribute to Billie Holiday. Their leader, enjoying its commercial success, is grinning on the cover of the latest *Down Beat* magazine.

He is somewhere in the spacious three-story club, replete with another bar above and a restaurant beneath. When he emerges from the basement bathroom, leisurely climbing the stairs, a little preoccupied, reeling perhaps from his performance, there is a quiet gracefulness to his movement but nothing to suggest the warmth of his humility. He is an imposing presence; his thick frame, stylish attire, and aloof demeanor render me timid in his company. But I was so wowed by his musicianship that I felt compelled to tell him so.

That evening I exchanged flattery for acknowledgments with Terence Blanchard on an empty stairwell at the Top O' the Senator, but our first close encounter occurred a year later, in 1995, when I interviewed him at that same club.

Out of that meeting came an opportunity to write this book, which was a challenge that inspired me. In addition to the usual demands of writing a biography—researching, interviewing, transcribing, and editing—I would be required to keep pace with a consistently prolific subject.

The fact that Blanchard is an active, modern musician was very attractive to me. It is important to document and learn about jazz artists, but retrospectives of careers long ago far outnumber books about the new and exciting ones. Jazz is thriving in the twenty-first century, as popular as it's been in forty years. So to explore one of today's leading musicians, one that we can actually embrace and enjoy, promised to be relevant and refreshing.

Now entering the second half of his life, Blanchard is in his prime, braced for infinite possibilities and success. But because he has already amassed such an impressive and diverse body of work, some assessment of his life and career is in order.

I began spending hours upon hours interviewing him in his Garden District home in New Orleans, at various venues and hotel rooms in New York, Detroit, Montreal, and my hometown of Toronto, or, as a last resort, on the phone when he was too far to reach in person.

Over the years, Terence was an accommodating subject. He gave his time whenever I requested it, and he never ordered content restrictions on our conversations. Predictably, he relates tales about his formative years in New Orleans, his cherished time with Art Blakey, and his numerous collaborations with Spike Lee. He also speaks openly about his family, including his father's fatal illness and the sudden death of his close friend, Miles Goodman. However, Terence's divorce from his first wife, Jackie DeMagnus, was an area of reticence. My instinct was not to push him, knowing his thoughts and feelings had been openly articulated in his music, *Romantic Defiance*, which is far more interesting anyway.

And that is precisely the appeal of Terence Blanchard—his music. Jazz is intellectual and intricate with unlimited possibilities, and its complexities can be rewarding to audiences. Still, when explored by some of its musicians, there have been charges of indulgent, esoteric playing—alienating listeners with thorny improvisations, loose harmonies, and abstract melodies.

Blanchard and the musicians in his band perform for an audience. There is an expressive and lucid sophistication to their playing that resists the temptation of technical esotericism. Then there is something to be said for his stage presence: a jovial entertainer in the tradition of prebop performers, Terence engages spectators with his dry, improvisational humor and storytelling abilities. The quiet and introverted boy from New Orleans now elicits laughter and levity from stages around the world, which is just as important, he feels, as presenting good music.

As a trumpeter, Terence has created his own sound through the instrument, a warm and dexterous crooning quality that both musicians and singers like to bounce off of. It was fully developed after his successful but laborious embouchure change, the most dramatic period of his career.

A composer of considerable range, Terence has forged solid footing in the precarious film industry, complementing his jazz recordings with several scores. In fact, with over thirty to his credit, no jazz musician has composed for more films than Blanchard.

En route to such distinction, he formed relationships with the jazz elite and top Hollywood directors and composers, many of whom, in addition to granting interviews, are discussed thoroughly in this book. *Contemporary Cat: Terence Blanchard with Special Guests* is made up of numerous voices as dozens of artists speak about Terence and their work together in previously unpublished words. This book seeks to illuminate those collaborations, what motivated them, what challenged them, and the colorful anecdotes that came out of them.

Tracing Terence's career through interviews with those who know him best lends authenticity and intimacy to this book. Its style also allows for more color and free-form discussion. More than chronicling Terence's jazz and film projects, conversation explores compelling social issues like the segregated South and why African Americans are rarely seen in jazz audiences today. Its far-reaching scope delves into the civil rights movement and how its leaders Martin Luther King and Malcolm X have influenced the artists of this book.

One of the perks of such comprehensive interviewing was a rare opportunity to meet and converse with so many great artists whom I have long admired. Appealingly, they all came forth without prodding. They were all happy to do it—an indication of the respect Terence garners among his peers.

After fifty years, Sonny Rollins remains inspired and active on the jazz performance circuit. So many generations have been so fortunate to experience his music live. During his career, he has accumulated an enormous songbook with such popular fare as "St. Thomas." Invariably, the calypso rhythm induces dancing in the aisles, but you know you are watching a special performer when he announces that the previous tune was written by his friend Thelonious Monk. The expression may be cliché, but Sonny Rollins is truly a walking history of jazz. He is the last of the great Giants.

Now in his seventies, his energy remains remarkably boundless in performance. He still plays with the vigor and endurance that he has long been reputed for, exploring the entire stage, shuffling his shoulders and bopping his head like a pigeon. It is truly a sight to behold. But when the music stops and he emerges from his trailer, he shows his age, moving languidly to his van. Still, he stops to sign autographs and pose for snapshots. He is remarkably open for a musician of his stature.

Later that evening, to my delight, Mr. Rollins accepted an impromptu interview. He was thrilled to speak about Terence, whom he considers to be an exemplary musician and person. When Terence learned of his mentor's flattering remarks, he was so overcome with honor as if he had been ceremoniously confirmed into the pantheon of jazz musicians.

I had the privilege of engaging Joe Henderson in an hour-long telephone conversation from his home in San Francisco. For decades he was considered one of jazz's best-kept secrets until he achieved tremendous exposure in the nineties, winning three Grammy Awards.

In 1998, he gladly received an invitation to perform on Terence's Sony Classical debut recording, an amalgamation of jazz and film music. A life-long fan of movie soundtracks, *Jazz in Film* is among Henderson's most inspired playing, and his lyrical exchange with Terence on André Previn's "The Subterraneans" is magical.

Shortly thereafter, toward the end of a long bout with emphysema, the tenor titan spoke passionately about his ambitions and how Terence, a musician twenty-five years his junior, has inspired him. Sadly, Mr. Henderson passed away on June 30, 2001, of heart failure, and *Jazz in Film* was his last recording.

Jazz in Film would also be one of the very last recorded performances of the very talented Kenny Kirkland. When Branford Marsalis propositioned him to join his brother Wynton's first band, Kirkland was already one of the most respected young pianists on the New York scene. His star would rise with Wynton and later with Branford's quartet, but there was a feeling that he had yet to realize his full potential.

Kirkland's death in November 1998 came out of the blue. It had shocked and anguished his closest friends. He was only forty-two, but a weak heart that was exasperated by drug use had claimed his life.

Terence was on the road in Birmingham, England, when he was informed of the sad news. He always had a great deal of fondness for Kenny's musicianship, but he mourned the passing as a loss of a friend whose company he enjoyed.

Over the course of working on this book, several of Terence's collaborators passed away, including the legendary J. J. Johnson, whose influence on trombone was so enormous that he set a standard to which all successors strove.

In the last years leading up to Johnson's curious retirement, he remained prolific with live performances and studio recordings, including *Let's Hang Out*, featuring Terence on three tracks. He thought highly of Terence as a trumpet player, but as a onetime film composer, he was particularly impressed with Blanchard's scores. Johnson's retirement in 1998 saddened the jazz community, but his violent suicide left it reeling.

For twenty-five years, film producer Marvin Worth had persisted to see the making of *Malcolm X*. And he was prepared to make another enduring commitment to bring Miles Davis's story to screen.

Worth had been so impressed by Terence and his music for *Malcolm X* that he had already committed him to write the score. Actor Wesley Snipes was said to be interested in portraying Miles, but there were too many conflicting ideas about the subject, and the script underwent endless rewrites. Worth was experienced in fighting these types of battles, but he would lose a bigger one to cancer, dying in April 1998. Consequently, the Miles Davis film project is stuck in limbo.

When Terence flew to California in the summer of 1996 to cowrite a score with Miles Goodman, there was no way to know that he would ultimately finish it by himself. While working together out of Goodman's Brentwood home studio, Terence's friend and mentor died suddenly and unexpectedly. Terence was there to witness his collapse, and he vividly recalls the details of the harrowing incident.

I had hoped to speak with both of Terence's parents, but his father was too ill to converse. When I arrived at the doorstep of their New Orleans home on a cool January afternoon in 1996, Mrs. Blanchard opened the door with a quizzical half-smile and welcomed me in. Although Terence had told her to expect me, she seemed uneasy about the function of my visit. She sat me down at her kitchen table and politely excused herself for a moment to attend to Mr. Blanchard, who was bedridden in a nearby room. When she returned, she rigidly lowered herself into a chair across from me and smiled nervously. I wanted to make her more comfortable, so I improvised a question about her grandchildren that brought a warm smile to her face. She responded enthusiastically about Terence Jr. and Olivia (granddaughters Sidney and Jordan were not yet born).

Wilhelmina Blanchard is an authentic New Orleanian. Her accent is not thick, but there is a soft, southern cadence in her voice. From then on, her words flowed voluntarily. For two hours, she recited her fond memories of raising her only child, a smart and obedient boy who enjoyed going to the movies, watching wrestling, and playing football.

Mother and son look alike and remain close today. She takes pride in his life and career, laughing at the days when Terence's trumpet playing was so unbearable to everyone's senses that they had him practice in the backyard.

Occasionally, she excused herself to attend to her husband, one time bringing back a framed photograph of him. His resemblance to Terence is also unmistakable.

Regrettably, our conversation is dated by the death of Joseph Oliver Blanchard, her husband of thirty-seven years. He was a good father, says Mrs. Blanchard, who reared his son on his own strict moral code despite his

desire to pamper him. His passion for music was so strong that it helped galvanize Terence to become a professional musician, a goal Mr. Blanchard had once set for himself.

Although I was unable to speak with Terence's father, Terence's maternal aunt, Alice Douglas, who was an active participant in his upbringing, provided a wonderful complement to those years. Like her sister, there is a soft-spoken kindness in Mrs. Douglas's voice. And while she too was unfamiliar with taking a stranger down memory lane, she seemed happy to make that trip.

The winter months of 1996 were brutal. Much of the United States and Canada were bombarded with snowfall. During this time, I began my initial research in New Orleans. It was unseasonably cool there too, often dipping into the thirties, but it was still a pleasant escape from Old Man Winter.

Until I was settled, I stayed with Terence and his soon-to-be wife, Robin, in their exquisite home on Prytania Street. The Garden District, in Uptown New Orleans, is an elite nineteenth-century residential neighborhood. Their grand, pink-colored house was said to have once belonged to slave plantation owners.

Terence's pianist, Edward Simon, who was still new to the band, was also staying there. He was stuck in town after their gig at the House of Blues because all flights to his home in Pennsylvania were postponed. Edward is a gentle, introverted man who chooses his words carefully. Other than music, he has a passion for language and culture. We enjoyed watching *Gandhi* together on videotape.

Robin is a fabulous cook, but Terence's favorite spot to eat is a late-night hangout fifteen minutes east of the city on Chef Mentour Hiway called We Never Close. His passion for po' boys (New Orleans-style sandwiches on long French bread) rallied us into his fully loaded Volvo sedan for regular visits to the drive-thru. Terence's choice po' boy is fried oysters and shrimps topped with Tabasco-infused mayonnaise. He was "tickled pink" to be home, just recently moving back after fifteen years in New York.

One night, he strolled briskly and confidently through the musical streets of the French Quarter, where he was greeted with a few head bobs of recognition. He led us all to Preservation Hall on St. Peter Street, the most famous jazz joint in the city. Although it attracts capacity crowds on a nightly basis, its décor is simple if not rundown. A small number of battered wooden benches were already occupied when we arrived, so we sat on the floor with our backs pressed against the peeling, dingy walls. This wasn't the Cotton Club. But Terence ensured us of a good time. Af-

ter all, his friend and homeboy Leroy Jones was playing that night, a dazzling trumpeter/singer who was also happy to be home after a long tour with Harry Connick Jr.'s big band.

I awoke the next day to Terence's stereo. He is an early riser and enjoys listening to music first thing in the morning. He would play jazz but also Stravinsky and John Williams's *Schindler's List*.

One evening, at my request, he played selections from his own album *Romantic Defiance*. We each had our favorites: Edward, who has a predilection for ballads, made an obvious choice with "Unconditional." I favored the dark, haunting urgency of "Divine Order." Interestingly, Terence selected a bouncy number called "Focus."

The recording of his newest album, *The Heart Speaks*, had just been completed. It was still a couple of months away from release, but Terence played it for me, directing my attention to the end of "Congada Blues." He was excited about the finished product and looked forward to touring the music.

Earlier that day, he and Edward took the St. Charles streetcar to the Quarter to add to his already massive music collection. They returned with the complete sessions from Miles Davis's seminal 1965 date at the Plugged Nickel. The newly released material was a point of giddiness for Terence, who wasted no time loading the discs in his state-of-the-art stereo.

When the music stopped, we discussed the two great quintets Miles led. I preferred the edition with John Coltrane, while the musicians cited a stronger affinity for the freer framework of the mid-1960s group. To my surprise, the next morning I awoke to the music of *Kind of Blue*.

Although Terence was on hiatus from the road, he was very busy. When not composing in his home studio for HBO's *Soul of the Game*, he was in California interviewing for the romantic comedy *'Til There Was You* or in New York recording on pianist Billy Childs's album *The Child Within*. Still, he was constantly listening to music. Mid-1960s Miles Davis in his car; Thomas Newman's *The Shawshank Redemption* in his living room; live recordings of Louis Armstrong in his studio. Terence broke into a chaffing laughter when he described Pops's minstrel presentation, but then he quickly straightened up and exclaimed, "He could play!"

Bassist David Pulphus, a young bachelor in his early twenties, drove around in style in his brand new Pathfinder—for his instrument, he said. He lived nearby in a New Orleans shotgun (a house whose architecture is characterized by several rooms joined in a straight line from the front to the back). He dropped by frequently and unannounced, usually to play action-packed video games "to vent all of that hostility," we joked.

When Terence returned from California, his longtime drummer Troy Davis, who lived eighty miles northwest, in Baton Rouge, drove down with his wife. The quartet was together, and although they spoke of renting some space to rehearse, they went to the gym instead to work out.

On the weekend, we were treated to a visit by Terence's children. His daughter, Olivia, was a shy and precious three-year-old, and his son, Terence Jr., on the brink of turning eight, was talkative and curious. They live with their mother in the city and visit frequently. A room that I was sleeping in would be furnished for them.

I settled into a charming bed-and-breakfast on nearby General Pershing Street in the Uptown neighborhood where Terence's mom was raised. Finding my way around town was made easy by the hospitality of my interviewees. After my conversation with Terence's aunt, Alice Douglas, she kindly drove me to the campus of the University of New Orleans (UNO) where I was to meet her old friend Ellis Marsalis. They had attended Dillard University together with another pianist/educator and integral figure in Terence's formative years, Roger Dickerson. A professor in occupation and demeanor, Mr. Dickerson, like the Blanchards, still lives in the same house that Terence spent countless hours inside practicing.

Ellis Marsalis, who presided over jazz education at UNO, had been a prominent figure for the city for decades. Since his days at Xavier University and then more famously at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA), he has been lionized for instructing more than a dozen of the world's top jazz musicians. He retired from UNO in 2001 and was succeeded by one of his former students, Terence Blanchard.

With fifty years of musical experience, Mr. Marsalis still performs regularly in his own band and occasionally with his four musician sons. Ironically, his career as a pianist and bandleader got a marketing boost when his eldest sons, Branford and Wynton, burst onto the jazz scene with striking fanfare in the early 1980s.

I first met Branford Marsalis at the 1996 Montreal Jazz Festival. He was there that summer with his father touring their excellent album, *Loved Ones*. I had crept backstage to proposition him for an interview, and he quite generously invited me to his home in New Rochelle, a short commute from Manhattan.

It had been more than a year since Branford quit *The Tonight Show* in California, but he did not appear to be settled in this house; cardboard boxes were everywhere. In one room, presumably the dining room, is where I waited for him. He was held up from a round of golf—a new hobby he was passionate about. There was a well-rounded selection of books in a

nearby case—he is a voracious reader nicknamed “Book”—but the most eye-catching to me was the autobiography of Miles Davis. I wondered whether all jazz musicians considered it requisite reading.

When Branford arrived, he apologized for his tardiness. He was hungry, though, and before we began he quickly fixed himself a bowl of cereal. It would be the first of two conversations—his friendship with Terence is genuine, and he thinks of him fondly.

Our first meeting transpired just days after the TWA Flight 800 tragedy that had claimed the wife of his friend and mentor, Wayne Shorter. We sat on the porch of his suburban house located in a serene community with an adjacent pond. Friendly passersby engaged him in conversation about his golf game, his last tour stop, and his favorite baseball team, the New York Mets. He was popular in the neighborhood but not in a manner specific to a famous entertainer.

The scene was innocuous enough, but an hour later I had been jolted by his strong, caustic views on music, greed, vanity, and racism. His brutal honesty, irreverent humor, and the complexities of his character give this book charismatic spice.

For a man so regularly burdened with so many people making requests for his time, Wynton Marsalis was remarkably affable and accommodating. Interestingly, he and Terence, two of the greatest trumpeters in the world, were by their own admission two of the worst. They were eleven when they met, playing together as third-stringers in a big-band summer camp in New Orleans.

Less than ten years later, they were both in New York making a name for themselves by igniting the 1980s jazz resurgence. Their rivalry has been played up in the media, but they have a friendly and sincere respect for each other.

For all of his success as a jazz musician, this book is as intrigued by Blanchard's cinematic endeavors in Hollywood. What started as a novel assignment performing on the soundtracks for Spike Lee's early “joints” quickly blossomed into a celebrated career as a film composer.

My background in short filmmaking as a writer and director had equipped me with a high regard for the relationship of music to movies. The best film music fleshes out a director's vision. It can communicate the vital nuances that language or pictures cannot, giving audiences greater insight and heightened emotional attachment to the characters and story.

Directors are infamous for lamenting over their film's score because music is an art too complex for the average filmmaker to create or even mold. They are often subject to vulnerability and compelled to place a great

deal of trust in their composer. Thus, a director-composer relationship is a delicate and often difficult collaboration.

After partnering with more than a dozen directors, Terence has a career filled with revealing insights into the collaborative process and why it is often the most troublesome of all filmmaking alliances.

It was the winter of 1997, and I had just seen my idol, Spike Lee, in person for the first time. He was sitting in his familiar perch at Madison Square Garden watching his beloved Knicks battle their nemesis Reggie Miller and the Indiana Pacers.

He had been a hero to me since my formative years. The resilience and fortitude he demonstrated in launching his feature filmmaking career was a constant source of inspiration. Additionally, the mighty resistance he withstood from Hollywood's studios for artistic control of his films had shaped my own aesthetics.

I was to meet with Spike that winter to discuss Terence and their work together, but he had been bogged down with his own projects and had postponed our interview. But it was with great curiosity that I watched him that afternoon, particularly after stoppages in play. He was in the midst of production of a documentary called *4 Little Girls*, and in an effort to fully utilize his time, he was scribbling notes, reviewing materials—working in a room of twenty thousand basketball fans. It was an image so strikingly unconventional that I developed a new appreciation for the demands of his schedule, which would deter our talk until 2001. In March of that year, he was between films (but still working on a TV project about Black Panther Huey P. Newton) and could accommodate an hour-long interview.

A meeting was scheduled at his advertising office, Spike DDB, on Madison Avenue, but he was detained that afternoon at Studio One, a postproduction facility on nearby Broadway. He rescheduled the interview there after his session and invited me to sit in with him until it was finished.

He was on the eighth floor of the Brill Building at the end of the hall, in Studio C. I entered the dark and hushed room where a panel of filmmakers reviewed footage of actor Roger Smith as Huey Newton. It has been said of Spike that he sees you before you see him. He is very attentive to his surroundings, not unlike his hero, Malcolm X.

Colorfully dressed in an orange sweater, green cords, and a black and orange Knicks toque, Lee gestured me over to him and pointed to an empty chair at his side. We shook hands, and I sat down and reveled in the fortuity of observing him at work.

They were sound-editing the picture, which can be a long and tedious procedure, so in between directing his staff, Spike engaged me in small talk.

He is a sober person; he speaks slowly in a low monotone. There are occasional bursts of enthusiasm that may be accompanied by his trademark cackle. When he smiles, it's usually in only one corner of his mouth. He is polite and avoids using profanity.

Amid the perfect pandemonium of Times Square, Spike Lee and I stood on a Broadway sidewalk fifty feet south of 49th Street waiting for his driver to arrive. His celebrity was demonstrated by curious gazes and giddy laughter from passing pedestrians. A pair of young women stood at the intersection staring and grinning, then waving at him. Spike waved back and then glanced down at his watch. In just an hour (the amount of time he had committed to me), he had to be at the Garden; the Celtics were in town.

His plan was to go home first, a thirty-minute drive through the stifling traffic, then another half hour back to the arena. We hopped in the back seat of his Mercedes SUV—his personal driver, Earl, was at the wheel—and we began our interview.

Spike's relationship with Terence dates back to the late eighties. They had known each other through the Marsalis brothers and became closer on the set of his 1990 jazz movie, *Mo' Better Blues*. Terence has written the original music to every one of his films since—a point of pride for the director. Lee is a loyal man who cherishes longtime partnerships.

When we arrived at his home on the Upper East Side off Lexington in the Sixties, Earl parked behind a black Lincoln Town Car, and Spike excused himself to speak with its driver. He returned to fetch a canvas book bag he carried, asked me to wait for him in the other car, and then vanished into his century-old townhouse.

As I waited, our new driver, a chatty white man in his fifties, queried me about Spike. Having never driven him before, he was only familiar with Lee's bad rap in the media as an antiwhite, cantankerous time bomb. But after meeting him, he, too, started to doubt its validity.

When Spike reemerged a few minutes later, he was, of course, still sporting the Knicks toque but had changed into his Latrell Sprewell jersey. For a man so serious, there was something unusually charming about him walking toward us (with the humorous saunter of his *Do the Right Thing* character, no less) dressed in the gay abandon of this blue, white, and orange apparel.

Terence has often accompanied Spike to the Garden, and despite being an equally ardent sports fan, he remembers how amusing it is to watch Spike demonstrate his passion for Knicks basketball. But his move to New Orleans in late 1995 squashed the regularity of those outings. Actually, when Terence told him he was moving, Spike, the consummate New

PREFACE

Yorker, was disappointed and could not fathom why he would want to leave the city.

So whenever club dates bring Terence back to New York, Spike makes every effort to visit him at the venue. More than collaborators, they are friends, and while he thinks of Terence as one of the premier film composers, he marvels at his trumpet playing and considers him a jazz musician first.

Yet to think of Blanchard as only one or the other, to judge him on his jazz music only or his film scores only, would be inappropriate. Each part makes up the whole.

My book thus presents Terence as a uniquely diverse talent with a myriad of remarkable achievements and musical associations. I hope that my rendering of the story of Terence Blanchard and his special guests evokes for its readers some of the same joy and profundity associated with their music and movies.

INTRODUCTION

The Dangling Carrot



Hit 'em hard and wish 'em well.

—Bill Fielder

June 28, 1995: The Toronto sun has set by now, but the insufferable humidity lingers into the evening. As millions of people across Canada's metropolis seek refuge from the sweltering summer heat, 120 jazz fans squeeze into their favorite haunt, the amply air-conditioned Top O' the Senator. On tonight's marquee: the Terence Blanchard Quartet.

The lights are low, the stage is vacant, and the Dangling Carrot is well out of reach, as the capacity crowd settles in their seats and orders cold drinks. Rather than taking solace in the respite they are now enjoying, the music lovers wear flabbergasted expressions and chatter endlessly about the outside humidity permeating the club.

When the band appears on the small but intimate stage, they are accompanied by distracted applause, as idle conversation lingers on. But as Blanchard and company burst into "The Promise," filling the room with its distinctively crisp and warm sound, an enchanting look welcomes them in. These four musicians, with their acoustic instruments, snuff out the audience's preoccupation with the weather and capture their undivided attention. Unfortunately, such a riveting performance is threatened when someone begins tampering with the room's impeccable temperature. Yet when a gust of hot air strikes the crowd, no one complains; not a single person seeks relief. In fact, they all seem to welcome it; Terence Blanchard is on fire.

Considering he is the culprit, Blanchard embraces the new climate and nourishes it all night long. Flushed and sweaty, it is a small price to pay, for the Dangling Carrot has now moved within his grasp.

INTRODUCTION

After blazing past the midnight hour, the trumpet virtuoso finally stops blowing. He reintroduces his band, says goodnight, and steps off the stage to a spectacular embrace of firelike crackling applause.

Before vanishing up the stairs to their private lounge, Blanchard and his rhythm section turn to acknowledge the audience's adoration with a variety of grateful gestures. But gratitude is not what this exhilarated crowd wants. Their expression of affection surges into a relentless pursuit for more music. It does not matter that the musicians have now departed; these enthusiasts will not be denied.

Down the stairs they come; the straight-faced bassist, David Pulphus, appears first. He is followed by the ever-bopping and always-smiling drummer, Troy Davis. There is a momentary gap before the pleasantly serene pianist, Edward Simon, emerges with their leader. Suddenly, Blanchard's fingers snap out the tempo to "Dear Old Stockholm," and the full house, rewarded to approval, quietly return to their seats to indulge in the moment. They may hope the evening will last forever, but at its inevitable end, there isn't a disappointed face in the crowd. All are indeed grateful to Blanchard for producing a brand of heat unique to a midsummer night in Toronto, Canada.

CHAPTER ONE THE BIRTH OF A JAZZMAN



I was lucky in the sense that I always knew what I wanted to be, even from a very young age.

—Terence Blanchard

Once upon a time, in a land not too far away, a musical creation evolved into America's most distinguished art form. Settled on the last southern stretch of the Mississippi River, New Orleans, Louisiana, is recognized as the birthplace of jazz.

According to music historians, jazz was first heard on the streets of New Orleans during the last decade of the nineteenth century. While the art form was developed in the United States, its origins are found in the African roots of those who created it. There have always been a large number of African American musicians, but at the turn of the twentieth century, music in some southern areas was all but considered a black profession. For blacks, music, and especially jazz, functioned as an emotional release from the legalized racism they had to endure.

During its early stages, jazz was essentially dance music with a strong foundation of the blues. It was a music free from traditional structure, as musicians improvised variations of rhythm and harmony according to the way their spirit moved them. Indicative of the time, whites generally dismissed this new creation as a crude and chaotic fad, going as far to denounce it as "the devil's music." Such public rebuke initially confined jazz to a notorious, sixteen-block district of New Orleans called Storyville.

Infamous for its wild dance halls, extravagant whorehouses, and all-night cabarets, the whole district was alive with music. Storyville attracted the city's finest musicians, all of whom emerged as pioneers in the evolution of jazz: Buddy Bolden, Freddie Keppard, Bunk Johnson, Red Allen,

Johnny Dodds, and Sidney Bechet. The three most dominant influences were pianist Ferdinand Joseph “Jelly Roll” Morton, cornetist Joseph “King” Oliver, and the Crescent City’s greatest son, trumpeter/vocalist Louis Armstrong. To his peers, Armstrong was known simply as “Pops,” a genial term used to describe his superior talent. Many music historians credit Armstrong as the artist responsible for eventually implementing rhythmic and melodic order to the so-called crude and chaotic beginnings of jazz.

As jazz flourished (not only in New Orleans but across the country and around the world), the Crescent City was counted on for its supply of polished jazz musicians. In 1917, however, the secretary of the navy deemed Storyville’s red-light district a self-contained kingdom of vice. New Orleansians witnessed the shutdown of the district and the demise of their city as the jazz capital of the world. The music then sailed north along the Mississippi River, arriving in Memphis, St. Louis, Kansas City, and Chicago. It also spread to Dallas and its new capital, New York City, where it thrived for the better part of the next fifty years.

Jazz could still be heard in the French Quarter, but New Orleans did not produce a major jazz artist after Louis Armstrong followed the music to Chicago in 1922. Coleman Hawkins, Lionel Hampton, Charlie Parker, J. J. Johnson, and Miles Davis originated from the Midwest; Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Art Blakey, Sonny Rollins, and Clifford Brown from the Northeast. The Carolinas combined to produce Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, and John Coltrane. Dexter Gordon and Charles Mingus made up a duo from California; Lester Young hailed from Mississippi, Cannonball Adderley from Florida, and Ornette Coleman from Texas.

This deficiency was attributed to the city’s growing preference for new musical forms such as rhythm and blues, and fusion. However, fusion music—an integration of rock ’n’ roll and jazz—did not merely thrive in the French Quarter. It became a popular genre for musical domains everywhere.

During its first seventy years, jazz survived ill repute and premature deaths of its pioneers to become America’s greatest contribution to world culture. Yet, in 1969, when the frenzied popularity of rock infiltrated jazz, it immediately plummeted into a vast abyss. It was an era that would last ten-plus years, but at the time, many musicians, critics and fans alike, believed that jazz would be permanently cannibalized.

Then in the early 1980s, jazz and its favorite city came full circle. After a drought of sixty years, a powerful stream of New Orleans jazz musicians started surfacing in the most reputable conservatories in the country. Performances before capacity crowds in clubs and concert halls followed. Once again, the world was watching the city by the river. New Orleans be-

gan unleashing one talented jazz artist after another, spawning a timely revival in the music. This incredible movement in American music history is known as the 1980s jazz resurgence. Emerging at the forefront of this action was a young man who grew up in the Crescent City’s Ninth Ward on Odin Street, Terence Blanchard.

Born March 13, 1962, Terence Oliver Blanchard soon knew that he wanted to become a professional musician. Growing up in a musical city certainly helped him realize such a goal, but it was the discipline and the determination instilled by his father that truly shaped Terence.

Joseph Oliver Blanchard studied opera and revered classical music. As a young man in the mid-1930s, he sang opera in and around New Orleans with a group called The Harlem Harmony Kings. As his aspirations of a permanent career in opera began to mount, segregation and bigotry thwarted them: discrimination against blacks who desired careers in opera and classical music was common. When the great Charles Mingus grew up in a Los Angeles ghetto studying cello, saxophonist Buddy Collette convinced him to switch to bass: “You’re Black!” exclaimed Collette. “You’ll never make it in classical music no matter how good you are. If you want to play, you’ve got to play a ‘Negro’ instrument.”¹

Forced to give up his dream, Blanchard then sold insurance for most of his life, an occupation that provided a stable income for his family. Still, he managed to remain active in the local music scene directing church choirs. At one Sunday morning performance, Blanchard met a lovely space filler in the choir named Wilhelmina Ray, whom he courted to be his bride.

Wilhelmina Ray, an authentic New Orleanian, was born in the Uptown section of the city in 1930. Although more than thirty-five years have passed since she resided there, Mrs. Blanchard yearns to return.

The Blanchards still live on Odin Street, in the same house where Terence first blew random riffs out of his trumpet. Nowadays, the doors don’t swing open as often. Once filled with relatives, the house now shelters only Mr. and Mrs. Blanchard. But Mrs. Blanchard’s memories of those days are fresh, and she shares them gladly. In a way, visiting Terence’s mother is like listening to his music: it soothes, excites, and engages.

MRS. WILHELMINA RAY-BLANCHARD: I was born right here in New Orleans, Louisiana—Uptown, on General Taylor Street. And the house is still there, 2918 General Taylor. And after living in that house for a number of years, we lived on the 2800 block of General Taylor Street for twenty-two years. And that’s where we grew up. And I love Uptown: “There’s nothing like Uptown!”

I was the second oldest of four children. I had an older brother and a younger one, but they have both passed. And of course, there's my younger sister, Alice.

MRS. ALICE RAY-DOUGLAS: My sister and I have been close since we were little girls; she's my best friend. We depend on each other. It's just the two of us living now, so we have to.

MRS. BLANCHARD: Our mother was a disciplinarian, but our father was just the opposite. He was very quiet and didn't have much to say. My mother was a strong Baptist and whatever she said was law and gospel. Therefore, we had to dance by her music. No matter what we did Saturday night, we all had to go to church the next day and Sunday School, too; that was a ritual in my mother's house. But I wouldn't have wanted it any other way. The values that she taught me have shaped my whole life, and I loved her for that.

My father worked long hours as a plantsman for Standard Oil, but he was there for his children at all times. And he was a child at heart, playing more games with us than we did with each other.

MRS. DOUGLAS: Our father was very quiet, but he must have spent all of his spare time with us. And that was really important to us. He played the guitar and sang a beautiful bass. He never had any formal training; it was just a very natural talent. We actually have a lot of musicians in the family, especially on my father's side.

I began taking piano lessons when I was very young, then I went on to major in music at Dillard University. I went on to teach at three different high schools for a total of thirty-three years. My background is mostly classical piano, but we had several cousins who were singers.

MRS. BLANCHARD: My parents wanted me to go to college—and I did, too—but I only finished high school. And that was my mistake. I only wanted to go to the college where all my friends were going, which was a boarding school. My parents couldn't afford it, but as youngsters you don't understand "can't afford." So I decided not to go at all because I thought I was hurting my parents, but I ended up hurting myself.

After I finished high school, I worked at the cleaners as a checker. I liked that job because I was constantly meeting people. I like people and I like to talk. When customers would come in, my face would say, "Talk to me." I could strike up a conversation in a minute.

But everything wasn't always so pleasant, you know, with segregation. There was this one rich lady that came to the cleaners regularly, and she would always compliment my coat that was hanging up on the wall. But she didn't know it was mine because every time she came in, she'd ask the white employees if it was their coat. They all said no, but they didn't know whose it was. I never said anything. Finally, after she couldn't figure out whose coat it was, she said to me, "Do *you* know whose coat that is?" And

I said, "Well yes, it's my coat." But she didn't believe me, "How can *you* afford a coat like that?" And I said, "I learned how to sign my name."



Joseph Oliver Blanchard, the second of three children, all boys, was born in St. Martinville, Louisiana, in 1914 to Gabriel and Cauliest Blanchard. His father was known as "Red" because of his Indian coal-black hair, fiery red mustache, and his sandy-colored beard. Red enjoyed wrestling and boasted that he had never been "throwed" by any of his opponents. Relentlessly, Cauliest wrestled with whatever challenge came his way and always succeeded in conquering that which he set out to do. Tragically however, he was killed in a rice mill accident mere months after his youngest child was born. In an attempt to provide a better future for her three boys, Gabriel packed up her family and headed east for New Orleans.

MRS. BLANCHARD: Although his name is Joseph, we've been calling him Oliver all his life. It wasn't until we saw his birth certificate that we discovered his name was Joseph Oliver.

He left St. Martinville for New Orleans when he was twelve. Oliver was only two when his father was killed, so he never really knew his daddy. He got caught in one of those machines. I never met his mother, but I understand she was a midwife back in those days.

I never wanted to get married, and I was late getting married. I never really wanted a husband. I know it's odd and I don't mean to sound selfish, but I always used to think that I didn't *need* one. I think this was all because someone very dear to me had a terrible experience with her husband. It put a damper on men for me. And now I sit down and wonder all the time how Oliver ever caught up with me. I guess it was love.

We met in November of '59 when he came to our church to direct our choir. I couldn't sing, but I was in the choir; I was a space filler. I know the Lord didn't give me a voice because he knew I would drive everyone crazy. Oliver sang opera with a church group and traveled locally.

TERENCE BLANCHARD: He studied a great deal; he's a guy with a serious passion for music. People that knew him in his prime said he had a wonderful voice. He wanted to be an opera singer but didn't pursue it because of the racial stigma during those times. But he never became embittered; he sang in New Orleans every chance he got. The music was the only thing that he focused on. That's what I saw growing up.

Although he didn't really talk about it much, I knew he was frustrated by it. I think it also had a lot to do with the fact that he didn't know what to do or where to go; you see that a lot in the South. There's a lot of talented kids who can do some great things, but they're just sitting at

home. They never had someone to tell them to go to New York or to see a certain teacher or musician.

MRS. BLANCHARD: Oliver is seventeen years older than me and had already been married. His wife passed because of a brain aneurysm. They had a child but it was still-born, so Terence was really his only child.

He was a young man when he married his first wife; he was only seventeen. Oliver was the type of person who needed to be married. I told him that I didn't want to get married, but he insisted. I don't know what kind of magic he used on me, but in a year's time we were married. Actually, it was in June of '61.

TERENCE BLANCHARD: It's kind of hard to describe, but to me, their marriage has been amazing. Like any other marriage, they had their problems and differences, but unlike many, they were able to overcome them. Growing up, it never seemed to me like they could ever break up. I guess everybody wants their parents to be that way. I just happen to be one of the lucky ones.

MRS. BLANCHARD: Originally, we were going to name Terence after Oliver's father. But I thought Cauliest was a rather odd name, so I started looking at one of those name books. When I saw the name Terence, it stuck with me—I liked it. So when Oliver came to the hospital, I told him I was going to name the baby Terence Oliver.

Terence was a very good baby. I never had any problems with him at all. With Oliver, he was more of a toy than anything. Of course, Terence was our only child, so Oliver spoiled him rotten.

MRS. DOUGLAS: Oh, he was very excited over his *one* son, his *only* child. He did everything for that little boy, and my sister, too—everything. I mean, they would even go as far to carry his school books. That's when I stepped in and reminded them that we wanted Terence to be a *boy*. They were going to make a sissy out of him! Since no one wanted that, they finally stopped.

MRS. BLANCHARD: Wherever Terence wanted to go, his daddy took him. I remember when the movie *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* came out, Terence was about six, and they went to see that movie more times than I can count on all my fingers. They went to a lot of movies; Terence really loved them. Whatever movie he wanted to see, his daddy took him at least two or three times.

TERENCE BLANCHARD: He took me to see *Fiddler on the Roof* because he thought it was something I should see—and it was. [singing] "If I were a rich man . . ." He loved the music. Then he took me to see *Jungle Book* and *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*—all that kind of stuff. But I really wanted him to take me to the wrestling matches, which he wouldn't do. Everything had to be a cultural experience. He was the type of guy who wouldn't let

me play with toy guns. I remember he saw me chastise a cat in the street one day, and he jumped in my shirt about it. I knew he was a humanitarian, but I was like, "It's only a cat."

Sadly, over the last five years, Oliver Blanchard has become ill with transient ischemic attacks (TIAs). These attacks cause a brief interruption of the blood supply to part of the brain, resulting in a temporary impairment of vision, speech, sensation, or movement. Typically, the episode occurs suddenly, lasting for several minutes or, at the most, for a few hours. Treatment is aimed at preventing a major stroke, which occurs in approximately 30 percent of TIA patients within the first five years.

MRS. BLANCHARD: He's completely bed-ridden now. He doesn't talk; he doesn't walk; he doesn't respond to hardly anything anymore. At one time he would respond to something on the television, but not anymore. For a while it wasn't so bad because he'd be up and around. I have to do everything now. But I want to take care of him myself. I don't like to leave him, and everybody fusses at me because I stay home.

When Oliver took ill, I would play Terence's music for him, and believe it or not, he knew the difference if I changed the music and put someone else on. At the time, it wasn't too bad because he walked around. But now, being in the bed all the time, well . . .

TERENCE BLANCHARD: My dad was a real passionate man in terms of loving his son. We did a lot of things together, especially when I was young. But while I was playing with Art Blakey, I remember I came home one time and I kind of became his friend. He heard me on the phone talking to somebody about going to a club for a jam session and he said, "Hey, let me take that ride with you." I wasn't sure if he should come but he was like, "Come on, let me come with you." He just wanted to be one of the fellas. So he came, sat at the bar, and fell asleep. He had a couple of drinks and that was it!

MRS. DOUGLAS: Terence was an ideal child to have. His mother could always sit down and talk with him, not at him. He wasn't the kind that would just fly off. It didn't really take much to make him happy. He was respectful and quiet at all times. I don't mean to say that you could just run over him. You could get Terence to do what you wanted him to do, but he'd always let you know what he thought he should do. The thing about Terence was that he was always very focused on what he wanted, which was to be a musician.

TERENCE BLANCHARD: A lot of people say that about me, but I did have an interest in sports. When I was in elementary school, I thought I was going to be a football star. I was playing Little League football and

became quite serious about it. I was even picked to be on one of the All City teams. I played on the line, both offensive guard and tackle. Actually, we didn't have enough people for both offensive and defensive squads, so I played linebacker, too. I had a lot of fun playing the game until my father took me out. A lot of kids were getting hurt, some even paralyzed, which really scared my father. That's when music became a dominant thing in my life.

MRS. DOUGLAS: Terence's father was a musician and naturally, he wanted Terence to become one, too. But he wanted Terence to play classical music, not jazz.

TERENCE BLANCHARD: I loved the fact that there was always music played in my house. My dad was very instrumental in developing my appreciation for music. He'd always be playing his records. But I hated the fact that it was mostly opera and not the popular music of my time that I heard in the streets. And we would always argue about music. I would always talk about how great Miles Davis and Clifford Brown were, and he would always say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, but I can't hear no melody." While we never really settled this issue, I learned as an adult to love the fact that my dad never disrespected my opinions. He would always encourage me to stick by what I believed in and make my case.

MRS. BLANCHARD: Since my sister was a music major, Terence would go to her for anything he didn't understand. She would coach him along at times. My husband had a great deal to do with Terence's musical development, too. There were a lot of influences on Terence, and his daddy pushed him more than anybody.

TERENCE BLANCHARD: My family helped out a lot. They supported me in every way, which was great. They never really forced anything on me, but my father did push me to practice a lot when I was a kid. And I hated the fact that my lessons were based on boring exercises and classical études designed to build strength in my hands. My dad would come home tired after work and make me practice while he sat on the sofa listening to every note. When one of the many notes I played—in any piece of music I was learning—seemed out of context with the rest, he would stop me and say, "Stop and go back; that didn't sound smooth." But I loved the fact that these lessons got me to the point where I could play a piece of music on my own in public, even if my dad felt the need to start me on my practicing regimen two months prior to any scheduled performances.

I hated practicing, but he instilled a discipline in me. If it weren't for my father, I don't know where I'd be. His diligence helped me to build the confidence I needed to perform in public.

MRS. DOUGLAS: I wasn't fortunate enough to have children, so I really feel like Terence is part my child, especially since we all spent so much

time together when he was young. My sister worked, so in the summer I would go over to the house to look after Terence and my other nephew, Eric. And with me, you had to drink milk and eat vegetables. And they hated it. They always wanted soft drinks and hamburgers. Soft drinks for lunch, soft drinks for dinner. Terence recently admitted to me that they used to call me "The Vegetable Queen" behind my back.

Terence was very young when he started playing piano, and I had read that it's not always the best thing for the family to start a youngster in music. So I said to my sister, "Let's get somebody else." We contacted Martha Francis.

MARTHA FRANCIS: Terence's aunt also taught music, and she said to me, "Martha, I think Terence has *something*, but I don't think I should teach him because I'm too close. Would you teach him?" Of course, I said yes.

I always knew that Terence had *it* from the beginning. I've been teaching since 1954, and during that time you sometimes get a feeling that, "Hey, this kid's going to . . ." Well, I always felt that about Terence.

He caught on very fast, definitely faster than the average child. The thing I noticed most with Terence was that he was very conscientious for such a young boy. I used to play the pieces for him, and he'd come right behind me and play them perfectly. That's when I realized he had a good ear, and I explained to him that it was a gift, but I told him that in order to become a musician, you must be able to read. From then on, I never played the pieces for him again. I just put them in front of him so he could learn to read.

TERENCE BLANCHARD: Mrs. Francis had a great effect on me. She was a great teacher, but what I remember most was her patience and the way she could motivate me.

MRS. BLANCHARD: Terence started out on piano with Martha before he even started school. He was always over at Martha's house because she had four boys. We were next-door neighbors, and sometimes he wouldn't even come home for supper.

TERENCE BLANCHARD: Going over there was like going to my second mother's house. She used to discipline me just like my mother would. I remember she had a lot of friends who played piano as well. We lived right next door, in one of those double houses, and my bedroom wall was right up against their living room wall. So late at night I could hear them playing piano; it was like a piano house!

MARTHA FRANCIS: Terence was like a fifth son to me. He used to come over and play with my boys all the time. I can still picture this one incident when they were about eight or nine. Having four boys, I had two bunk beds on each side of the room. And I remember them coming downstairs to ask me for some towels. I didn't give it much thought

because I was busy doing something, so I said, "Yes, you can take the towels."

The next thing I heard was this big bang and then a loud scream. So naturally I ran upstairs to see what was going on. As it turned out, they were playing "Superman," jumping from the top of one bunk to the other. They had tied the towels around their necks using them as capes. My two oldest boys went first, and they had made it. Then it was Terence's turn. But instead of jumping to the next bed, he fell right smack in the middle of the floor!

TERENCE BLANCHARD: Man, that's funny. I forgot about that. We had a lot of fun. Her son Mark and I were the same age, and he was always getting me to do crazy stuff like that. I remember he was so strong for a little kid. But that was my last jump!

MRS. BLANCHARD: Terence never talked much as a boy and still doesn't. With Terence, you have to be able to push that little button, then he'll decide to talk. Sometimes he'll take over an entire conversation, but if you don't know how to push that little button, then you won't get anything out of him. As much as Terence has traveled, he doesn't talk about it. Of all the people he's met, he doesn't talk about them. But that's his nature. Terence was always more or less a loner than anything. I mean, he had friends but was never what you'd call close to anybody. I think that he's a little more outgoing now because of the field that he's in. But his daddy was like that, too. Oliver had friends, but he liked to stay to himself. Terence is very much like him.

TERENCE BLANCHARD: It's true. I think it's probably because I was an only child, so I got used to being alone. The older I get, the more I value friendship. But sometimes that workaholic in me keeps me from getting close with people because whenever I have a free moment and think I should be calling somebody or getting in touch with a friend, my mind is going, "Well, you could be doing this or working on that." It's a work ethic I get from my dad. He was a workaholic, too, but I look at that as being one thing that hurt his health. But you know, also, when I was a kid in elementary school, I got good grades and wore glasses when they weren't fashionable. I was always ridiculed about that stuff, and I guess I never really felt like a kid who fit in with the popular kids. So after a while it just became part of the routine, and I didn't really mind it. But it all changed when I got to junior high and high school.

MRS. BLANCHARD: Terence was always a good student, but when he got to junior high school he began to—as old folks used to say—smell his oats. Teachers started calling me because of his behavior. It wasn't that he was a bad kid; it was just that he'd finish his work before all the other children and then tantalize them. I had two or three teachers tell me, "He's

not a bad little boy, but he's got to learn to stay quiet." Then the teachers started giving him extra work, but Terence still finished before the others.

Racial injustice and the American South have long been synonymous. Until President Lyndon Johnson passed the Civil Rights Bill in 1964, blacks were confined to the poorest sectors of the economy by way of legalized segregation.

For a forty-year period, beginning at the end of World War I, several thousand black southerners uprooted to the North in hopes of escaping social disharmony and realizing greater economic opportunity. In most cases, the migration manifested itself in two steps: a move from a rural farm area to a southern city and then to a northern city, primarily New York, Chicago, and Detroit.

Many of those who participated in this massive migration prospered economically from the move, even though the reduction of racial seclusion was minimal. It may have been illegal, but societal pressures restricted blacks from residential choice. Segregated schools and discrimination in the workplace also lingered on in the new black community.

MRS. BLANCHARD: At one time, my husband wanted to leave the South for some town in Michigan. He worked for Sears & Roebuck for years selling insurance, and they were willing to transfer him there, but I told him, "No way." I didn't want to go up in the cold! Besides, I have some cousins that live in Chicago and St. Louis, and the ones from St. Louis had come down to visit us because they had heard terrible things about the South and how we were treated. But they were shocked when they got here because they realized it wasn't nearly as bad as they had thought. Then one year I visited Chicago, and, to me, the living situation *there* was horrible. I found it to be more segregated there than I did in New Orleans.

Indirectly, by never venturing to the so-called Promised Land, the Blanchards probably preserved their son's musical destiny. By staying in New Orleans to raise their only child, they gave Terence the opportunity to mature in one of the most musical cities in the world.

TERENCE BLANCHARD: I think New Orleans is one of the greatest places to learn from, especially during the time I was growing up. I got an opportunity to hear musicians play live in a traditional style *every* day. On the way home from school, I used to love walking down Bourbon Street. Some of the clubs used to have twenty-four-hour music—it was amazing! I would hear Teddy Riley play, guys like Emery Thompson and Danny

Barker. Obviously, I couldn't go in and have a drink, so I'd stand right outside the door and listen. Then when I got home I could listen to Clifford Brown and Miles Davis records. This way I could see right before my eyes how the music had evolved over time.

Also, there were a lot of teachers around at the time; it was a healthy period. I knew I wanted to be a musician from very early on, but I really didn't have any teachers. I mean, I had piano teachers, but no one to really teach me how to play on chord changes or how to compose—you know, the creative aspects of the music. So when I ran into those guys I was in heaven. I felt like I was learning a lot every day. And the thing that I always try to reiterate is that we didn't get instruction from one particular person; it was a well-rounded and well-orchestrated thing.

There was Alvin Batiste who taught [saxophonists] Donald Harrison and Branford Marsalis. Roger Dickerson was my composition and piano instructor. George Jansen taught me and Wynton [Marsalis] trumpet, Bert Braud theory and analysis, and of course Ellis Marsalis was teaching everybody jazz. These guys knew what they were doing. They had gone abroad and studied very hard and wanted to give something back to the community. And I commend all of them for that because so many of us will just abandon our communities nowadays.

Terence received the kind of instruction and exposure to jazz unique to New Orleans, a city where accomplished jazz musicians conduct assemblies in elementary schools. While in third grade, Terence sat in the gymnasium of his school, Mary D. Coghill Elementary, awestruck by Alvin Alcorn, the trumpeter who gained international fame in Kid Ory's Creole Jazz Band. Alcorn had an attractive tone and subtle style not unlike Miles Davis's, but he was also known for occasional bursts of exhibitionism. That afternoon he showcased the instrument's exciting repertoire of slurs, smears, and growls, inspiring an eight-year-old to make a lifelong commitment.

TERENCE BLANCHARD: Seeing Alvin Alcorn turned my life around. I'll never forget it! From that day on, I wanted to be a trumpet player. The thing that amazed me was that I could see this guy's mouth at one end of the instrument and hear all this *stuff* coming out the other end. I remember him bending notes and the way he phrased. I couldn't do *that* on the piano.

Studying piano with Mrs. Francis was cool—and I'll never forget her—but you know, as a kid, it kind of got boring and a little frustrating. But the funny thing was, I couldn't readily get out of it because she lived next door! So I had to constantly go to my lessons. But when Alvin Alcorn came to my school, he really woke me up; he caught my attention. I mean,

I had heard trumpet players before, but seeing Alvin Alcorn was really the first time I had heard the trumpet by someone who could *play* it. And I think that's what caught my ear.

That day I remember running home after school to tell my parents that I had to have a trumpet. But they were a little upset because they had just rented a piano.

MRS. BLANCHARD: When Terence first got his trumpet, my mother and father were living with us at the time, and my mother said to me, "He's not going to play that in the house, is he?" And I said, "No way! He can go in the backyard and practice." But it wasn't too long before my mother began to actually enjoy it. She used to sit down on the couch and listen to Terence practice all day long.

MRS. DOUGLAS: Playing music was just a part of the family. But what fell on Terence, well . . .

Note

1. Grover Sales, *Jazz: America's Classical Music* (New York: Da Capo, 1992), 184.

had like a serious love for it so I used to go to the label meetings and take notes about what was being said about it. Then I would come back and share my thoughts with Dr. Butler—George has always been a social kind of character. He wasn't really into the daily running of this jazz department. So I would talk to him and to my boss about doing some promotion for jazz. I mean, there was no one servicing radio, no one was paying attention to the roster, but my boss didn't really want to hear about it: "Please, jazz is not on my agenda."

At that time the black music department had like fourteen number one songs in one year. They were dealing with George Michael, Michael Jackson, New Kids on the Block, Lisa Lisa and the Cult Jam, Regina Belle, and Jeffrey Osbourne; it was all blockbuster sensations. They were not thinking about Terence and Donald's *Crystal Stair*, Branford's *Royal Garden Blues*—that was not a priority.

TERENCE BLANCHARD: I have some friends in the black music department at Columbia, and I told them, "Look, whatever you all need me to do, let me do it." I said, "I'll be your guinea pig." I want to go out there and reconnect jazz with all of these folks. We don't need to sit here and act like they don't exist because they do. I didn't grow up in a totally white environment; I grew up in a mixed environment. So I just want to let them know that I'm cool and that they have nothing to fear. They can come to this music; nobody's going to intimidate them. We're not stuck-up musicians. I hate that whole notion.



Terence is eager to dispel many of the myths associated to those in his profession and the music that he plays. Such a lofty undertaking is not only admirable but, to a degree, reminiscent of preceding generations of African Americans. Blacks in the United States have long been forced by a society saturated with stereotypes to challenge misrepresentation of who they are. At no time has this been more apparent than during the civil rights movement.

Notes

1. Dave Helland, "The Marsalis Tapes," *Down Beat* (November 1989): 17.
2. Unknown Internet source (1997).
3. Michael Bourne, "In Tribute to Lady Day," *Down Beat* (May 1994): 19.
4. Wayne K. Self, "Back from Frustration," *Down Beat* (August 1992): 33.

CHAPTER TEN MALCOLM AND MARTIN: A COMMON DREAM



They might have had different means, but they were after the same end: dignity and rights for black people, and all oppressed people.

—Spike Lee

For Terence and especially more recent generations of African Americans, the horrors of the segregated South are a distant nightmare. But for those who were victimized by it, the vivid memories of injustice and maltreatment remain.

MRS. BLANCHARD: Segregation was the biggest thing in New Orleans when I was young. There were certain things we weren't supposed to have. You know, we were all supposed to live in shacks. It was hard at times, but we managed mainly because of the strong values and pride that our mother instilled in us. She taught us that we were no different from anyone else, and I believed her. But I can't say that I wasn't affected by it.

When we moved [to Odin Street] in 1969, although it was predominantly black, we had whites coming over from Gentilly Woods, and they'd throw eggs and tomatoes at the house, even bottles and bricks—anything they had in their hand. The whole experience demoralized me to a certain degree. Knowing that another race looked at me as being inferior was awful. Not being able to go to certain places, shop in certain stores. But there was this one store where I had a special saleslady. She knew what I liked and was always nice to me. So it was a pleasure to shop there because they didn't look down on you. But for the most part, the whole experience was horrible.



When the U.S. Civil War abolished slavery, America was heading to legitimize its own declaration, "All men are created equal." Congress had passed the Civil Rights Act of 1875, giving equal rights to blacks in public accommodations

and jury duty. However, eight years later, the Supreme Court invalidated the new bill, dismissing it as "unconstitutional." It sanctioned the principle "separate but equal" and imposed the notorious Jim Crow laws that legally segregated blacks in southern states. And so, the Land of the Free continued to suppress the advancement of its people of African ancestry.

Over the next seventy years, such prominent black civil rights leaders as W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Medger Evers, Malcolm X, among many others, devoted their lives to fighting against these discriminatory barriers. However, no leader captured the hearts and hope of Afro-Americans like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. An emotionally stirring speaker, millions of blacks and whites alike were attracted to King's high moral stature. King fervently believed in the wisdom of Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent disobedience and set out to apply the credo in the hostile South.

Born in Atlanta, Georgia, on January 15, 1929, King has had his birthday celebrated in the United States since 1983 as a national holiday. After graduating with a doctorate in philosophy from Boston University in 1955, King moved back south to Montgomery, Alabama. In December of that year, a fellow Montgomery resident, Rosa Parks, defied the mandate pertaining to segregated seating on city buses. She refused to grant her seat to a white passenger. The courage and heroism exhibited by Parks inspired King to lead a boycott against the city's bus lines. Eventually, the city relented to King's demands of desegregation and allowed black passengers the freedom to sit wherever they chose. King's successful organization of the boycott and his humane policy of passive resistance to segregation garnered national attention and elevated him in the public eye as the prominent leader of the civil rights movement.

In the aftermath of Montgomery, King traveled throughout the South with intentions of ending the segregation of buses, lunch counters, hotels, washrooms, and other public facilities everywhere. He delivered inspiration and optimism while emphasizing the importance for African Americans to register to vote.

In 1963, one hundred years after the Emancipation Proclamation, the symbolic high point of the American civil rights movement occurred in the nation's capital. There, over two hundred thousand people gathered for the King-organized March on Washington. On the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, King addressed the world with his eminent speech entitled "I Have a Dream." (The speech and the march were the first-ever televised events to be carried internationally via satellite.)

This historical event is accredited as a major factor in the crumbling of the remains of legal segregation. King's essential function was not to lead black

people but to educate white people. His articulate, idealistic vision for the United States had a profound effect on the conscience of white America.

In 1964, King became the youngest recipient ever to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Yet just four years later, this young life was snuffed out prematurely by an assassin's bullet. On April 4, 1968, King was in Memphis, Tennessee, to lead a nonviolent march in support of striking sanitation workers. There, this man of peace suffered a malicious death.

Although James Earl Ray was convicted for the murder, many believe, including the King family, that Ray may have been innocent; who committed the cowardly act is unclear. One thing is for certain: America lost a towering figure of moral righteousness and social progress. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was thirty-nine.

MRS. BLANCHARD: Dr. King was something of a little Moses to me. He had made a difference with all of us. He gave us a sense of hope, inspiration and courage. Rosa Parks, too. I've had many experiences riding the streetcar and the bus where they'd ask you to move to the back, or to stand for someone else to have the seat. So naturally, I felt bad. It took Rosa Parks a lot of courage, and should I say *guts*, which meant a great deal to me. It was an inspiration. But most of the time we would just walk instead of taking the streetcar to avoid the humiliation. There would be times where we'd have bags full of groceries, but we'd still walk home.

MRS. DOUGLAS: Although segregation was difficult, it was a part of life for us, so we just tried to go about. Obviously, it was difficult going in stores, riding buses, all that; everything separated by "white" and "colored." You really felt like a second-class citizen. "What is so bad about me that we need to have these two separate water fountains here?" It's not a good feeling.

Martin Luther King Jr. meant freedom. He gave us a chance to be and do some of the things we wanted to. And Rosa Parks—here's a woman who's giving me a chance to feel like a human being. You know, but then you ask yourself, "Why couldn't I have been that kind of person?" We could have said no, but we feared going to jail. So you do have warm feelings for someone strong enough to do what she did. She inspired all of us to be strong and to start standing up for ourselves. "I'm not going into the stores that say I can't try on a hat anymore; I'll shop somewhere else." So Dr. King and Rosa Parks helped us a great deal to come up with the strength to make those decisions.

MRS. BLANCHARD: Terence had experienced some of it but not as much as we did. I don't think it really bothered him; I think he understood it. But Terence is the type of person that doesn't talk very much. I don't think he was affected by it because he has always been *music* from a little fella. And nothing else seemed to bother him.

TERENCE BLANCHARD: I grew up at the tail end of segregation, so I didn't really experience it the way my mother and father did. But people always talk about how integration may have been the *worst* thing that ever happened to the black community. While things were segregated, the black community had their own role models, their own establishments, their own places to do things; the black community was thriving. Not to say they were as financially secure as the white community, but emotionally, there were a lot of positive things happening because they were functioning *as* a community. With integration, a lot of those things were lost, especially in the educational system. A lot of the teachers couldn't understand African American culture or the neighborhoods in which we came from. Consequently, they didn't know how to deal with the social issues of the African American students.

DENZEL WASHINGTON: The fact is, not a whole hell of a lot has changed. When we took one direction instead of another, people said Martin Luther King was safer. That seemed to be the doctrine, and they got a lot of good things done and changed a lot of laws, but what you come to find out is, you can't change the way people think.

In the 1950s and 1960s, somewhere in there, we got mixed up with integration and assimilation. We lost part of our own culture and strength, and I think that Malcolm X was telling us, know who you are, learn who you are, learn what your true history is—so that when you walk out the door, you'll feel good about yourself because that's what the Italian American does. That's what the Jewish American does. That's what every nationality does; they're solid about who they are, and the African American was the one who said, well, we just want to be able to fit in.

Now people are realizing that the things Malcolm said then make a heck of a lot of sense. To know who you are, to be economically strong as a community. He called it nationalism. They called it separatism, but all he was saying was, "Hey, if you live in that community, why not spend your own money in that community? Why not own the business in that community? Everybody else does that."¹



Malcolm X was a man of complexity, a fascinating leader whose evolution as a human being never ceased. In his stirring eulogy, actor Ossie Davis summarized the slain leader's profound influence on an entire race in four short words: "Malcolm was our manhood."

Born Malcolm Little in Omaha, Nebraska, on May 19, 1925, he was a victim of a turbulent childhood. His father was a Baptist minister who dedicated his life to the "back to Africa" preachings of Marcus Garvey. This doctrine antagonized the local Ku Klux Klan, for they believed it was "spreading trouble" among the "good Negroes" of Omaha. After initial re-

sistance, the Littles ultimately submitted to the violent coercing of the terrorist group and fled Nebraska for Lansing, Michigan—a town that would not prove to be their safe haven.

Late one night, six-year-old Malcolm awoke to the shrill cry of his mother. He scrambled out of his bed to the living room where police officers just informed Mrs. Little that her husband was dead—his skull crushed and body cut almost in half. Reverend Little was thought to be attacked by the Klan and then placed across streetcar tracks to suffer a violent death. Mrs. Little was so devastated, both emotionally and financially, that the state Welfare Department eventually deemed her unfit to care for her children. Malcolm was removed from his family and placed in a foster home. Although he lost contact with his mother, he remained close with his four siblings. In fact, many of them would play pivotal roles in his adulthood.

While in the seventh grade, an incident involving Malcolm's English teacher, Mr. Ostrowski, proved to be a major turning point in his life. One day after class, the white teacher sat alone in a classroom with Malcolm, discussing his aspiration to become a lawyer. Malcolm was among Ostrowski's elite students, but the teacher told the youngster that it was an unrealistic goal for a "nigger." Although, in retrospect, Malcolm believed the teacher meant no harm, that his advice was just in his nature as an American white man, Ostrowski's remarks made him feel uneasy at the time. No longer did he feel immune to the derogatory remarks that were thrown his way. Malcolm began to feel withdrawn from his white peers, for Ostrowski had planted a seed of contempt inside the boy, one that would later blossom into deep-rooted aversion.

WILLIE METCALF: During the recesses at the academy, I played the records of Malcolm X's teachings over the PA system. Anyone could tell that Malcolm was an angry guy, but by playing his records, I was hoping the kids would take that anger and channel it into something positive, whether it's self-awareness, whatever. I didn't know at the time, but I later found out that it scared the shit out of Terence. But it prepared him for the movie *Malcolm X*. After the movie came out, I ran into Terence and he said, "Hey man, thanks for introducing me to Malcolm X."

TERENCE BLANCHARD: I'll never forget the first time I heard Malcolm X speak. We were all in this park on Jackson Avenue. We played a lot of concerts there with Willie Metcalf. And on breaks, Willie played Malcolm's speeches. Malcolm was talking about how this one's tongue needs to be cut out and blue-eyed devils and it scared me to death. I had never heard anything like it in my life. But I remember everybody else being into it. And it was weird because not only was I ignorant to Malcolm X, but you're around all these people who are your friends, and all of a sudden something shifts

CHAPTER TEN

and you discover something you never knew or suspected about them. It was like finding yourself in the middle of a cult or something. I thought they were just normal people [*laughing*]. It caught me off guard, but I was just naive.

Malcolm X was a much maligned figure, his message often misconstrued, but understandably so—the focus of his leadership kept evolving throughout his life. In his final year, even he conceded his uncertainty with which philosophy to adopt. But the fact that most associated him to his twelve years with the extremist Nation of Islam, when he verbally assaulted whites and preached separatism, irrevocably damaged his image.

Unlike Dr. King, Malcolm X did not believe in turning the other cheek. Advocating violence was not his theme either, but because whites were threatened by Malcolm X, the mainstream press and some Negro leaders strived to discredit him as a “raging hate-monger.”

By promoting this image, it more than muddled Malcolm X’s tireless efforts in the civil rights movement. It demonstrated an ugly ignorance. The militant years of Malcolm X were an instinctive, defensive counteraction to America’s treatment of blacks. His hate could be attributed to the effect persecution has on an ancestral line that dates back several hundred years.

TERENCE BLANCHARD: I didn’t read Malcolm’s autobiography until I got to college. See, I kind of moved away from that for a while, but then when I got to college—the militant part of your life—you discover new things and really a new world. So I started to understand more at that point. While I was reading it, I actually felt embarrassed. I felt embarrassed that history has taken his life so far out of context. But I think that’s what happens in general in America with Malcolm X. I’ve always believed that people only choose to take bits and pieces from his life. They dwell on the militant aspect of his life without fully understanding how he got there and, more important, where he went afterward.

SPIKE LEE: Malcolm was a very complex person. There were three or four different Malcolms. He was constantly evolving, his outlook and his ideology, and always trying to seek the truth. If he found it, he was not scared of being called a hypocrite. If he found a higher truth, he would say, “I was wrong. All that stuff I said before is wrong, and this is what I believe.” That’s something that very few people do.²

As a teenager in the mid-1940s, Malcolm Little was lured into the underworld of crime. He hustled, pimped, ran numbers, and pushed drugs on

MALCOLM AND MARTIN: A COMMON DREAM

the streets of Harlem and Boston before eventually getting convicted on fourteen counts of burglary in February 1946. Three months short of his twenty-first birthday, Malcolm was sentenced to ten years in jail at the Charlestown State Prison in Massachusetts. In the joint, he rediscovered education, diligently studying English and Latin. But it was a letter from his older brother Philbert that focused Malcolm’s new passion: religion. Philbert’s letter joyously announced that he had found the “natural religion for the black man” and that he had joined the “Nation of Islam.” After initial befuddlement and reluctance, Malcolm embraced the Islamic faith as well.

For more than forty years, the leader of the Nation of Islam was an African American from Georgia named Elijah Muhammad. Referred to as “The Messenger of Allah,” Muhammad’s fundamental message was that the “blue-eyed devil white man” had kidnapped the “so-called Negro” from his homeland and stripped him of his language, culture, family name, and familial structure. He believed that through his teachings, the Negro would rise up and return to where he had begun—at the top of civilization.

A message this outspoken was unprecedented in America. Never before had a Negro spoken so contemptuously of whites on such an area. His teachings reached and inspired African Americans across the country from churches to prisons. To inmate Malcolm Little, Muhammad was a guru, and he worshipped him unconditionally.

In 1952, after serving six and a half years, Malcolm was released from prison. He immediately joined the Nation of Islam and began spreading the message of Elijah Muhammad. In addition, he no longer replied to the name Malcolm Little.

During slavery time, most blacks had their African family name stripped and replaced by their slavemaster’s surname. The Nation of Islam believed the letter *X* (representing the unknown in mathematics) should supplement the slave name. Thus, “Little” was erased, and Malcolm X was born.

For the next twelve years, until his disagreeable split from the Nation in 1964, Malcolm X, who often described himself as “the angriest black man in America,” articulated black rage with highly controversial rhetoric.

But in March 1964, Malcolm announced that the Nation of Islam and Elijah Muhammad himself did not meet the standards they had set for others and divorced himself from the hypocrisy. A considerable rift developed between the Nation and their most celebrated apostle to the point where Muhammad allegedly issued an order for Malcolm’s assassination.

With the financial assistance from his sister, Ella, Malcolm escaped the hostility and ventured to Mecca to make a *hajj* (a religious pilgrimage that all

orthodox Muslims—if able—are obligated to do). There, he encountered a spiritual awakening and underwent a complete philosophical reconstruction.

Upon his return to the United States, he held press conferences, where for some, the unthinkable materialized. Malcolm X stood before the world and admitted a critical error in judgment regarding his cultivation of the teachings of Elijah Muhammad. He announced that he had become an orthodox Muslim and that if America desired an end to racism, it should embrace the ideals of the Islamic faith. His travels throughout Africa and the Middle East had produced a more optimistic view for the potential of peace and brotherhood. In fact, Malcolm ceased all talk of racial separation and embraced the idea of the “oneness” of man. Such newfound enlightenment spawned a sharp contrast to the “hate” that had gained so much momentum throughout his twelve years with the extremist Nation of Islam.

Mere months after his return from Mecca, Malcolm X’s fascinating life and career came to an abrupt end when he was shot in New York City on February 21, 1965. The assassins, although never charged, were thought to be connected with the Nation of Islam. Like Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X was gunned down at the young age of thirty-nine.

DONALD HARRISON: I think Malcolm—after he left Mecca—is the person that I really relate with. It wasn’t about color; it was about *human beings*. Everybody hasn’t learned that lesson, but if you don’t think of the world in those terms, then you’re really creating problems. After you get past race, we’re all humans. I do understand that this country was built upon a certain segment—my segment—being subservient. And I think when we play this music [jazz], we’re saying that we are people of great intellect, we are distinguished people, and we’re people who can achieve anything and will achieve anything. But when Malcolm came back, he was really spreading something that would have taken the whole country—not just black people—to another level, and it would have come at an opportune time. So it’s unfortunate that the message he was spreading before he was assassinated wasn’t fully blossomed.

TERENCE BLANCHARD: Yeah, you really felt that he was about to make a significant difference. I think he was on the brink of something in terms of the areas where black people really needed the help. It’s hard to say, but the possibilities were endless.

BRANFORD MARSALIS: Malcolm was a bad brother, man. He stood on his moral convictions, right or wrong. And he was a real man because he woke up one day and realized that some of the philosophies that he was preaching were incorrect and he was man enough to say, “I was wrong.” That’s a special cat.

SPIKE LEE: I was a convert when I read the book in junior high school. It’s the most important book I’ll ever read. The book gave me courage to do what I need to do to make the types of films I want to make. It takes commitment, and it takes backbone not to go along with the status quo. You could easily be sucked into smiling and grinning and going for the money. That’s not the route I’ve chosen to go.³

[When] I read it, I thought, “This is a great black man, a strong black man, a courageous black man who did not back down from anybody, even toward his death.” And then I woke up to other things that were going on around me that had nothing to do with the arts. People had pushed Dr. King’s philosophy and his legacy to the forefront—they were both dead by this time, around 1970. . . . And Dr. King was chosen for a national holiday. And there are times when Dr. King is a vehicle for my true feelings about the racial situation. But from what I read of Malcolm X, I immediately knew that what he said was much more in line with the way I felt. I have a deep respect for Dr. King, but I’ve always been drawn more to Malcolm. I think that I’ve really grown to love Malcolm more. What he stood for and what he died for. I just cannot get with Dr. King’s complete nonviolence philosophy.⁴

People should try to learn from both men. They were different, they might have had different means, but they were after the same end. Simply dignity and rights for black people, and all oppressed people. It’s something we could apply to ourselves today, to make it work for today, for the world we live in now.⁵

TERENCE BLANCHARD: Considering my introduction to Malcolm, it was very, very ironic for me to be doing the music for the film some fifteen years later; I think about that all the time. But I believe my experience is probably similar to a lot of people hearing Malcolm speak for the first time. But now I understand what happened over the course of his *entire* life and identify with it all because it was all a part of the process.

To me, Malcolm X was a person in search of something. His quest to unravel the truth about human injustice and to acquire human rights in the U.S. and abroad never wavered. Malcolm was a very sincere person who put everything out front for everybody to see, which leads me to believe that he had a large sense of humility. See, that’s what I love about his story because if the humility wasn’t there, then you don’t leave yourself open to change. I consider Malcolm one of my heroes because of how he evolved. He accepted the fact that everything he was taught by Elijah Muhammad wasn’t all it was cracked up to be. So I’m really amazed when people get offended by the mere mention of Malcolm X. I mean, here’s a guy who admitted his mistakes to the world! He understood racial segregation wasn’t the key and tried to make amends with the community. He realized the teachings that he was delivering were wrong, and he owned

CHAPTER TEN

up to it, unlike anybody else in that arena. I think a lot of people don't have the courage and the integrity to do that. I mean, we saw what happened with Nixon and Watergate, and with Clinton and all his scandals. I'm a Clinton supporter, so it's not like I'm trying to bash him, but none of those cats ever sat down and really tried to make amends for any of that stuff. But Malcolm did. So for me, my level of respect for Malcolm at that point goes sky high. That's what life is supposed to be about. Those are the principles and values that we're taught as kids but forget as grownups. So it was really inspiring to see a person who maintained those kind of values throughout his life.

Notes

1. Roger Ebert, *Roger Ebert's Video Companion 1994 Edition* (Kansas City, Mo.: Andrews & McNeel, 1994), 806.
2. Elvis Mitchell, "Playboy Interview," *Playboy* 38, no. 7 (July 1991): 68.
3. Ebert, *Roger Ebert's Video Companion 1994 Edition*, 794.
4. Spike Lee and Ralph Wiley, *By Any Means Necessary* (New York: Hyperion, 1992), 3.
5. Lee and Wiley, *By Any Means Necessary*, 6.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY: THE MAKING OF MALCOLM X



I thought it was really important that the film was made because so many kids focus on a very small portion of Malcolm's life—the militant part.

—Terence Blanchard

In 1990, twenty-five years after he was murdered at a podium in Harlem, Malcolm X's legacy galvanized many to realize their highest potential. Still, for most Americans, he was remembered as a symbol of violence and white hate. Others didn't remember him at all.

Hollywood studios, of course, were not in the habit of making big-budget movies about black leaders who were either feared or forgotten. But film producer Marvin Worth remained undaunted. Since acquiring the movie rights to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* in 1967, Worth made several attempts to produce the picture. More than a marketing issue, adapting the sprawling and sincere autobiography into a screenplay was a demanding assignment. Such accomplished writers as James Baldwin, David Bradley, Calder Willingham, and David Mamet had each authored scripts that did not satisfy expectations. Even award-winning directors like Sidney Lumet and Bob Fosse failed to create a vision for the material.

Then in the summer of 1989, following a two-decade search, Worth thought he found his man. After seeing *Do the Right Thing*, the producer sent a letter to Spike Lee offering him the director's chair. Somehow, Lee never received the letter, and since he heard no reply, Worth figured he was not interested.

Finally, in early 1990, it was announced that Denzel Washington had signed on to portray Malcolm X, and Norman Jewison would direct playwright Charles Fuller's screenplay. Jewison and Fuller had successfully collaborated in the past on 1984's *A Soldier's Story*. Adapted from Fuller's