# Ep15_BetweenAcrossThrough_TedJamaica

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[music]

**0:00:03.3 Speaker 1:** This is Between, Across, and Through.

[music]

**0:00:22.2 Speaker 1:** At the beginning of 1962, Jamaica was getting ready for independence, and people across different social sectors had different ideas of what it meant to be Jamaican and how the identity of the nation would be different from that of its colonizer, how its music, how its history should play a role on deciding its future. Today, Professor Kevin Lewis O'Neill, director of the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies, is joined by Professor Ted Sammons from the University of Toronto. We will discuss the album Jazz Jamaica, which was recorded and released especially for Jamaica's independence. We will examine how the Workshop Octet envisioned this LP as a tool for nation-building and explore the legacy that this album and the musicians had on what we know today as the celebrated Jamaican sound. Please join us as we travel Between, Across, and Through.

**0:01:26.4 Professor Kevin Lewis O'Neill:** Hello, I'm Professor Kevin Lewis O'Neill, and I'm joined by Professor Ted Sammons. Thanks for joining us, Ted.

**0:01:31.0 Professor Ted Sammons:** It's great to be here.

**0:01:33.3 PO:** Can you tell me what it is about the album Jazz Jamaica that makes it so compelling for you?

**0:01:40.0 PS:** Yeah, well, I can try. I think that probably the first thing I would have to say is that I really like listening to it. I think it's a great album. I think it's a great piece of musicianship. The music on it is... It's got a real interesting variety and solos are wonderful and I love it. But I would also say that a big part of it has to do with when it was released and who it was that played on the record. First of all, it was released right on the cusp of Jamaica's independence, which was in 1962. Jamaica had been a colonial territory of England since 1655. They got a universal suffrage in 1944. So this was a culmination in 1962 of a long effort that had been underway toward the sovereignty of Jamaica as an independent state.

**0:02:30.7 PS:** So first of all, that the album came out at that time was real interesting to me and important. In addition, this was a big ferment of music at the time. There was an explosion of music that started to take place around that era that gave birth to a lot of the musics that we, in a contemporary moment, might more immediately associate with Jamaica. The musicians that play on this record, there are eight musicians that make up a band that's referred to as the Workshop Players or the Workshop Octet.

**0:03:03.0 PS:** These musicians, including Don Drummond, Ernest Ranglin, Carl Mcleod, Roland Alphonso, Tommy McCook, these are people who, at the time, were extremely active in laying the groundwork for Jamaica's departure into having a musical form or a music genre, a music style that the country was known for. A national sound was being created at the time, we refer to it today, the

style of music people refer to as ska, S-K-A. But at the time, these musicians themselves were among the crew of 20 or 30 people that kind of circulated in and out of different studios to make up these different mix match ensembles to be the backing bands like Stax/Volt Records or like the band that backed all of the Motown artists in the United States, really round about the same time.

**0:03:56.8 PS:** So we had a convergence, both of the historical moment at which this album was produced and released, and then also the historical significance, both at that moment and in the time since of the individuals that recorded it, that really drew my attention to it and that have really sparked an interest in the album outside of just enjoying listening to it, that's lasted for years and years and years so far.

**0:04:22.2 PO:** When they recorded the album Jazz Jamaica, were these musicians, this octet, were they part of necessarily the Jamaican elite?

**0:04:30.0 PS:** There may have been a few of the members of the octet that came from less than a humble background. But overwhelmingly, the artists that perform... That make up this ensemble are people that came from very humble beginnings in Jamaica at a time when humble beginnings of Jamaica was really dirt poor. These were men, several of them were raised in orphanages. Thomas McCook and Don Drummond were both children that graduated from the Alpha Boys School for abandoned children. Roland Alphonso and the base player Lloyd Mason, were graduates of the Stony Hill industrial reformatory school for boys. These were people that were not well-healed in their childhood, nor once they became musicians or as adults, were they part of the elite on the island or really anywhere off, for a couple of reasons.

**0:05:28.1 PS:** Number one, the opportunities that they had as musicians to join an elite class were very, very slim. There wasn't really much of a recording industry in Jamaica prior to the early 1960s, which is when this album came out. And secondly, though, at this moment of independence, there was a great conversation underway about how to distinguish the nation, both from its British colonial past, and from other nations in the international community, as well as how to determine the pathway forward that the country should take. And politically, these individuals were aligned with groups of people that were very different from the minority of brown and white, middle class and upper class, college-educated, many educated abroad business class, that these individuals, these men, the octet that were on this, they may have performed for some of the members of the elite at clubs and stuff, but their bread and butter was much closer to the masses.

**0:06:28.7 PO:** And so how were the Jamaican elites trying to frame race and nationalism during this independence movement?

**0:06:33.7 PS:** This is a really important point, especially because of how pronounced Jamaican-ness is, or how familiar it is in a certain way around the world today. There was an extraordinarily successful nation-building in terms of reputation project that was going on at the time, and the elites faced a sort of a dilemma. Conventionally, what would happen is that in an anti-colonial movement, the people that were leading the anti-colonial movement, one of their priorities would be to say, "Well, we need to figure out what makes us different from the colonizer and celebrate and uplift all of the different things that distinguish us from the force that had come in and occupied our territory for all of these years." But the people that were in Jamaica had been carried there forcibly by the

colonizer. And so there was no pre-colonial local Jamaican heritage to draw on. The elites decided they were going to solve this problem, that is to create a Jamaican nation which was not British but Jamaican by underscoring its connection to Africa, which is the continent from which the masses of Jamaica had been brought. Yet at the same time, what they wanted to do, their view was that there was a real likelihood that if one or another sector of Jamaican society were celebrated or given undue attention in the picture of what Jamaica was, that this would cause a problem for the integrity of the national fabric.

**0:08:07.5 PS:** So what they did was they said and... "We will bring Africa in, but we will bring a sort of a time-bound historical frozen Africa. We will not cultivate ties to the continent. We will not cultivate a notion of a future collaboration or unification with African heritage. But rather, we will say 'Okay, this is here, this is part of Jamaica. We will celebrate this. We will look back to uplift it and point out its value, but then we will turn to look forward.'" There have been a number of scholars that have really drawn attention to this and expounded upon it, really very effectively. Deborah Thomas who published a book called Modern Blackness in 2004 which really elaborates very much on the problem that the elites, in a way, created for themselves by pushing what is probably best referred to as a colour blind nationalism. They were trying to establish Jamaica as a multicultural sort of polity. Akin to the United States or akin to Canada, the motto they adopted was "Out of many, one," which is the English for the Latin "e pluribus unum," that was taken by the US. So they were interested in colour blindness, not interested in the attachment to African heritage that many of the workshop musicians themselves had.

**0:09:32.7 PO:** So how is this album a rebuttal to this idea of colour blindness that was so prevalent among Jamaican politicians and scholars?

**0:09:43.0 PS:** I would say that... That's an excellent question, that's a really big part of what draws my attention to this record. I think that in one instance, this was a rebuttal, probably most primarily, in that there was a cleaving to a form of music, that at the time, was taking on a political valence, a political significance of diasporic African radicalism. That is to say that jazz music at the time was in the process of taking on developing a political component that it had not had in the past. And so by opting to play their music, to play this album that they released at this time, in a jazz idiom, I'm encouraged to view this as being at certain odds with the colour blind notion of the Jamaican polity, the population that was being advanced by the elites. At the time, the elites were backed by an ideology which said that "Yes, there is this mixture, but to offer any acknowledgement of the history of unequal treatment and stratification by race in Jamaica, race and colour, that at the moment of independence, this was going to be detrimental to the project of moving forward."

**0:11:08.3 PS:** It was along similar lines to, if any of the listeners have ever encountered a person who might suggest that it is talk about race which creates racism. This was very similar to the attitude that the elites were trying to promote in Jamaica at the time, that yes, we have all this difference. Yes, we need to tolerate and respect one another, but any time anybody and particularly any time anyone who was of African descent is drawing any attention to that fact in a Jamaican context, that this should be silenced, that this was inappropriate. And this was shared on both sides of the political aisle. There were two political parties that were moving toward or were helping to advance the project toward Jamaican independence. And in both instances, this is Norman W. Manley's party and Bustamante's party, were concerned with downplaying the extent to which any

explicitly Black consciousness was being tied to the Jamaican nation.

**0:12:04.7 PO:** And so the album Jazz Jamaica stands in direct opposition to this kind of colour blindness and this effort to kind of quiet conversations about race and nationalism.

**0:12:20.6 PS:** These are aspects of it that I'm really interested in drawing out and highlighting. It is not my understanding, or I don't have evidence that would suggest that they were members of the elite, there was no crackdown on this album, there were no instances where members of the elite castigated it publicly, nor were there instances where the elite were castigating jazz, because jazz had been an important piece of Jamaica's tourist economy. However, it was big band jazz, it was jazz of Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington, it was dance music. It was music that was supposed, in a certain way, supposed to make American tourists who came to Jamaica feel at home, where they would come there and hear something familiar.

**0:13:05.3 PO:** And on the album, the music is something other. I'm thinking about your writing about the song Exodus, that is a track that appears on this album. How do we begin to understand the appearance of Exodus on Jazz Jamaica?

**0:13:22.9 PS:** That's an excellent point, and I really do feel like of the pieces of music that make up this package, this album, that is the standout track, the standout piece for me that really indicates the degree to which this album was a recording, in a certain way in a political opposition to the dominant streams of social organization at work at the time in Jamaica.

**0:13:48.9 PS:** Number one, it recalls a sense that was very commonly held, not only among members of the African-descended population of Jamaica at the time, but African-descended people in the Americas writ large, the story of Exodus had been historically widely appropriated and widely referenced by members of that population. Of course, the story in the Old Testament of the Bible, where we have a story of the freedom from bondage in Egypt, in this instance, we have people that are descendants, and this goes back to the time when their ancestor were in fact enslaved in the Americas, where individuals were forcibly Christianized, if they were exposed to religion, or if they were exposed to the written word at all, and where people had latched on to the Exodus story to say "Aha, this book that you are telling us that we have to read, and that we have to make a cornerstone of our lives, has a story in it, where there are people who are oppressed and they are held in chains and they are held in bondage, and they are released." And it is their release and their freedom which is a major story of the beginning of the Bible. People who were descendant of individuals who had been enslaved in the Americas quite naturally saw that as a story that they could rally around, that they could consider even a moment of solidarity among people that would not have otherwise met one another.

**0:15:15.3 PS:** So including that track for a variety of other reasons, which I'd love to get into, that was a significant choice that they made, but even just looking at it, people that are familiar with Jamaican music or familiar with the heritage and philosophy and thought and religion of people of African descent in the Americas, seeing the word Exodus on a recording would be an immediate tip-off, an indicator that there is something going on beneath the surface here.

**0:15:44.4 PO:** The Exodus narrative is biblical and has great obvious resonance within Jamaica. The song Exodus itself seems to have a history as well.

**0:15:53.6 PS:** Yeah, that's absolutely true. And that is another aspect of this. It really makes the story one that is really very rich. The song Exodus that appears on Jazz Jamaica from the Workshop is a cover version of the theme song from a movie that came out in 1959 called Exodus. This movie was based on a novel by a guy named Leon Uris. It tells the story of the settlement or depending on how you... There are others that would call it resettlement or occupation, of the territory that is now the nation of Israel. This movie was a triumphalist sort of propaganda film, but made in Hollywood, to tell the romantic and success story of the founding of an Israeli state. So it was an appropriation of the Exodus myth, the biblical Exodus story, where the Jews leave Egypt. And it was appropriation of that to be sort of reapplied to Jewish people under the auspices of a Zionist project.

**0:16:55.6 PS:** Now, in this instance, however, the song kind of took on a life of its own. The soundtrack recording is an instrumental orchestral song that has... It sounds like a Hollywood movie soundtrack, but with like big sweeping horns and lots of strings and so on, no lyrics. It won a Grammy, not only for best soundtrack album, but that song itself won song of the year in the United States Grammys. Soon after that, there was a piano duo who recorded under the name of Ferrante & Teicher who recorded an instrumental version of the theme song which is formally very much true to form, except instrumentally, it's just the two pianos. This reached number two on the US Billboard charts in 1961. So again, there was this, regardless of the film, the very theme song Exodus had begun to take on, as I said, a life of its own. It became quite a sensation, at least in the United States and in Europe, but it had a number of different branches that it made.

**0:17:58.5 PO:** What's interesting for me having gone on YouTube, but listeners could also go on other platforms and listen and even see different representations of these two early versions of Exodus, one is features doing pianos; the second, as you say, is cinematic and orchestral and sweeping, though somehow through jazz, they become a part of a project of Black liberation in the United States. How is that possible?

**0:18:27.0 PS:** Yeah, that's a really interesting part of the story. With the song reaching the popularity that it did in the US, one of the things within the tradition of jazz is to do cover versions of popular songs, but to put them to a different beat, and in a way to sort of reclaim them. So here, we had the stage set where the Exodus story itself had historically been claimed by multiple parties, among them, people of African descent in the Americas. We have a form of music that is a product of people of African descent in the Americas. So the ingredients are all there for this intersection to produce something really amazing. And I don't have a certain sense of who was the individual that did this for the very first time. I would imagine that it was probably done by a number of people in different places, all around the same time.

**0:19:19.3 PS:** But in that moment, a jazz saxophone player named Eddie Harris, known for his smooth playing of jazz before smooth jazz was a real thing but for his tone, he set the Exodus theme song to a conventional swung jazz beat without all of the orchestration and instrumentation, nor do they do it with the same beat or the same fealty or fidelity to the original version that these two pianos do.

**0:19:48.9 PS:** Rather, what Eddie Harris did was he took this theme song, sort of built on its fame and built on the significance of Exodus to a broader community of African-descended people in the Americas, and released a record in 1961 called Exodus To Jazz. We hear in Exodus To Jazz, of course, that theme song, but what is immediately discernible, and I encourage everyone to go check that out, you'll hear right away that the beat that is brought in is evocative of just "jazz". It is just a straight ahead swung metre. It is after Eddie Harris made that popular then that there were a whole number of other jazz musicians. There became this new branch, if you will, of the covers that would appear to have been what excited the Jazz Jamaica musicians. And it would appear to have been the strands of conversation that they then found themselves interested in contributing to.

**0:20:49.9 PO:** Ted, I'm interested because your reference to smooth jazz and Eddie Harris is provocative and very interesting, though the idea of smooth jazz doesn't strike me as particularly radical, especially when it comes to Black liberation.

**0:21:05.4 PS:** Absolutely, I would agree with that. We did have Kanye West hiring Kenny G to perform directly for Kim Kardashian, his spouse, but I don't read a whole lot of radicalism in that. And I would agree, I think that the smoothness part is a real important part of this story. A first place that I would suggest that really has to... We have to think about before we move into this conversation would be Amiri Baraka's book, Blues People, which he published in 1964. In this book, Baraka really gives us an elaboration on the way that in the late 1950s, jazz musicians deliberately through their artistic lot in with the political movement that is conventionally referred to now as the Civil Rights Movement that was underway in the United States at the time. That, in other words, that jazz itself had been popular, and to a certain degree, radical in the earlier part of the 20th century, radical for anyone to like it, really even. And yet then it became really very popular. And so we had a circumstance where, in the United States, a white guy named Paul Whiteman could be referred to as the father of jazz music, despite the fact that it was very obviously not something that had sprung from his own mind.

**0:22:32.7 PS:** What Baraka draws our attention to is that in the late 1950s, jazz musicians that were operating... Or really, in the 1940s after World War II, jazz musicians that were working in the United States at that time started to see playing jazz in the old way, in the swing way, to be tantamount to an endorsement of the status quo. And that in order to play their music in such a way that showed that they were not endorsing the status quo, they would need to develop some formal differences in the music they were playing. So we have a great shift in the 1940s, 50s and early 60s, from big band jazz into a style of jazz that's referred to as bop or as bebop. Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, these were some of the innovators, particularly Charlie Parker.

**0:23:19.0 PS:** However, Eddie Harris then playing in this milieu, was playing in a bop style. So despite the fact that he plays smoothly, and now in retrospect, we would think of him as a smooth player, it's not the smooth jazz that we conventionally think of when we're looking at the weather channel now, or turning on the television and watching a news ticker. It is a form that was cutting against an earlier established tradition, or a sense that jazz was big band jazz, it was orchestrated, it was short little solos, it was Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway. And it was dance music, it was not political, it was for having a good time and dropping all of the politics at the door and dancing away your worries. And these individuals, Charlie Parker and all of them, and including Eddie Harris, the milieu that he was releasing that record into was one where the musicians were deliberately

changing their style away from a big band dance music style to a kind of jazz that was geared more toward introspection and thoughtfulness, toward this bebop style, as a way to realize a set of political aims.

**0:24:31.7 PO:** Ted, what other kind of expressions of Black liberation do we see at this moment with jazz?

**0:24:41.2 PS:** It was teeming with it. First, perhaps again, go ahead and read your Baraka, everybody, but then read the Ingrid Monson book, Freedom Sounds. She reads industry magazines as well as does a number of interviews with performers that were recording at the time to really draw out the political edge that these musicians themselves were piping into their music. There were a number of ways that they expressed this, though. Oftentimes if you... Yes, you're playing something that's not big band, maybe they are longer solos and stuff, but it's quite beautiful. And so there's not a politics that is explicitly there with it necessarily in all cases. What Monson draws our attention to, and of course, we can see this in the jazz section of your local records store, that there were at least two ways that the musicians would inject or signify the political content of their music outside of, that is in addition to, the stylistic formal change away from big band jazz.

**0:25:37.5 PS:** Number one would have been in the titles of songs. They were instrumental, didn't have any lyrics, they might include the title of the song. Grant Green, the guitar player for instance, operating in the same era, recorded a song and called it Nigeria. So this is a man, he's not from Nigeria, he had not visited Nigeria. Nigeria had just gotten its independence right around that time. And he was recording an instrumental jazz tune in the United States called Nigeria, thereby signifying his intention that the listener should not just look at this as art for art's sake, but rather that he had a particular political aim that he was looking to advance through his music.

**0:26:15.5 PS:** In addition to that, we have perhaps an even more explicit example. We would see in a record that was released by Max Roach called The Freedom Now Suite, where on the cover of this record, we see Max Roach as well as other members of the band, sitting looking extremely dapper, wearing black suits and ties, sitting at a lunch counter. This is an album released right around the same time as the lunch counter sit-ins, protests taking place in the United States. But in We Insist! The Freedom Now Suite, what Max Roach did was he had him and the rest of the band sitting at a lunch counter, evidently not being served by the soda jerk who was working there, a white soda jerk who was working there. All three of these men are obviously of African descent. And maybe more to the point, obviously of an appearance that would have guaranteed that they would have been disallowed or restricted or forbidden from sitting at a lunch counter in the US South, given Jim Crow laws that were in effect at the time. So in essence, what they are doing through this record cover is showing that the music that they are releasing on this record is not to be mistaken as being somehow outside of history or outside of a political project that they were trying to advance, but rather that their music is in effect a conveyance of that politics.

**0:27:43.5 PO:** And in that spirit, the album Jazz Jamaica is dedicated to Jamaican independence.

**0:27:51.0 PS:** Yes, absolutely. While there are no songs on Jazz Jamaica that have the same kind of explicit... On that We Insist! Record, they have a song called Tears For Johannesburg. This was just shortly after the Sharpeville massacre in protest against apartheid in South Africa. So there were no

instances like that on this Jazz Jamaica album. Nor are there any instances of them explicitly sharing their politics through the artwork on the front cover. The front cover is just a composite of two pictures of the band in the studio recording, which is terrific. It is a tremendous photograph. It's a wonderful record of them in situ, if you wish, but at the same time, there wasn't anything explicit there to connect this album with the Jamaican independence project aside from the title Jazz Jamaica.

**0:28:39.9 PS:** However, what we find on the back cover of the album are the liner notes printed there, and liner notes, in some instances, of course, would have been printed on the inside jacket, but here you can see it just from picking up the record if you were in a store, it extols the virtues of the musicians, talks about how great they are and what a treat you are in for once you put this on your turntable. But then at the end, it clarifies, in bold print type, in all capital letters, this LP was recorded specially for Jamaica's independence. So it is explicitly situated, not only having been recorded at the time of the independence turn, but is explicitly situated as a work of art to be heard as part of the conversation that was ongoing about Jamaica's independence and what that would mean.

**0:29:28.8 PO:** And so going back to the track Exodus, by covering this American jazz version, Jazz Jamaica was in some ways tapping into this anti-colonial, radical conversation, it seems, about race.

**0:29:45.1 PS:** Yeah. That is what I feel like the signs are pointing to. There are a number of other signs that might encourage a reading of it along those lines. The film, of course, was shown in Jamaica. A member of the Jazz Jamaica ensemble, Ernest Ranglin, was interviewed about the cover and asked if he had seen the movie. He said he was aware of it, and that he was aware of the movie being about people who were struggling. However, when we listen to Exodus, we hear that it is both like and unlike those covers. One can tell that the message to jazz fans or the message to people in the United States or Canada or Europe, the message was not one of mimicry. It was not one of, "Please give us credit for being able to play your music as well as you do." Rather, it is a new statement in an ongoing conversation. Perhaps using the same idiom, both in terms of the general form and even in, "Alright, I'm going to a picture that you like to paint, but with different colours," for instance, or, "I'm going to paint it in my own way." We have here, at least for an external audience, a version of Exodus, which both connects to a foreign group, that is musicians outside of Jamaica, and yet at the same time, very much makes it a Jamaican product, something that is at the same time very much oriented inwardly and not simply outward.

**0:31:09.9 PO:** On that point, do you have any sense of reception in Jamaica, the kind of audiences that it attracted or the kind of reception it received?

**0:31:20.2 PS:** Well, there are a number of pieces that would help us to cobble... To help me to cobble together an answer to that question, although I don't have... There's no Billboard, there's not something that I can point to to chart it.

**0:31:31.3 PS:** Number one, there's no complaints about this album, as I mentioned before. I haven't come across anything in the newspaper where people were talking about, "This is trash, this album represents the decline of Jamaican civilization right when it's getting started." But in addition to that, this is one of two jazz records that this record label put out. And it is the second one. And there

were never any more jazz records that this jazz label put out. This jazz label entirely restricted itself to putting out ska and reggae after this. That would suggest that it wasn't a giant whiz-bang success from a marketing standpoint. It's my sense that at the time, the direction of the popular soundscape of music in Jamaica was very much moving toward dance and was against the direction that this album takes us. This album, for all of its qualities, it is not really a great album to dance to. At least, I haven't figured out a way to dance to it well. [chuckle]

**0:32:31.6 PS:** But secondly, it's an LP. And the record industry in Jamaica at the time, in the early 1960s, was really brand new. The first records that had been printed or had been pressed on the island had been in a shopping mall where you basically... You pay a little bit of money and you record your little tune, kind of the way you would in a photo booth. In addition, most people didn't have the money to buy a record player. And those that did have the money to buy a record player often were making a decision between buying a single, a 7-inch 45 that had two songs on it, which was a lot cheaper, and a lot of that was generally the pop music, or buying an LP that had seven or eight, nine tracks on it, which of course would have been more expensive.

**0:33:14.4 PS:** So it's my guess, it's my sense from these pieces of information and others, that this album, I wouldn't call it a flop, but I certainly wouldn't call it something that really carried the torch of the relationship between Jamaican musicians and Jamaican politics up the mountain. I think this was just something that is historically of really, really great significance for the genealogy that it kicks off, that it signifies, too, to the individuals that were involved. And I think, too, the fact that early on, it was explicitly tying together Africa, African America and Jamaican sovereignty, all of these things together. These are things that are real important to me about it, but I don't think that it was a great commercial success.

**0:34:01.4 PO:** Because it seems like, from what you've said, the more direct route to commercial success would have been by way of ska. And it comes to my mind, the question as to why they just didn't cut a ska record.

**0:34:14.2 PS:** Yeah, that is an aspect of this story that I have been wrestling with myself. And I suppose that I have finally just accepted that it's a riddle that I cannot solve, but that I can draw attention to its peculiarity. And I think that the decision that these musicians made, given Don Drummond, Thomas McCook, Ernest Ranglin, Roland Alphonso, potentially, we could read this as an anachronistic step, where the musicians themselves were unaware of how... Of just what they were contributing to. At the time, ska music being the popular music was also popular among the poorer sets in Jamaica in the cities. So it had a reputation, number one, as being sort of ghetto music, for better or for worse. And secondly, it had a reputation as being commercial music. And the individuals that made up the Jazz Jamaica octet, were, by all indications, totally fine with being associated with ghetto music from a political standpoint, but they were not interested in being associated with pop music. There were some... Ernest Ranglin, in an interview cites an instance where someone asked him, "So you're gonna keep playing ska and sell out?" There was this notion that to play ska, a notion about Ska that we now, it's difficult for us perhaps to wrap our mind around, much like in the same way that in this era, to be a Rastafarian in Jamaica was very, very dangerous.

**0:35:40.8 PS:** Rastafarians were pariahs in Jamaica. There had been a state-sponsored massacre of

Rastafarians, the Coral Gardens incident several years prior. And there were Rastas that these musicians in the Jazz Jamaica octet were hanging out with. So we have the indication that they were comfortable with a Black nationalist and a working class Black political movement. But in terms of the commercialism, it may have been, it seems, that their decision or the way they saw it was that, "If we really wanna play music that conveys the true political import, with respect to Jamaica's independence that we want to convey with this album, ska is not going to cut it, because ska will be mistaken for playtime, happy, party music. And what we want is to connect our music with something a little bit more solemn, something a little more thoughtful."

**0:36:33.9 PO:** And this is the way to characterize Jazz Jamaica, though the one outlier seems to be the first track, which is called Calypso Jazz. That's very different from what you hear in the track Exodus, for example.

**0:36:49.8 PS:** That's absolutely right. There's a Jamaican popular music expert who lives here in Toronto, his name is Klive Walker. Klive Walker has released a book that came out in 2005 called Dubwise. And in Dubwise, he says, "This is pretty much a straight ahead jazz album, but with some Jamaican inflections." What we hear when we listen to the first track, however, is what sounds like evidence of the musicians themselves introducing the listener to this dialectic, introducing the listener to this relationship between what a listener will expect to hear when they see the word "jazz" on the cover and what they will expect to hear when they see the word "Jamaica" on the cover. The album is called Jazz Jamaica. We don't really know for sure whether this is supposed to indicate whether it is jazz in Jamaica or jazz to a Jamaican style. But with this song Calypso Jazz, what we get is these musicians doing a halfway faithful and halfway not faithful, but in jazz, cover song, of a Jamaican or Caribbean folk tune called Iron Bar. Iron Bar was a standard for people playing Caribbean folk music, perhaps one of the most nationally, on the island, popular forms of music, mento music, was Jamaica's twist on Trinidad's Calypso.

**0:38:12.9 PS:** So here we have this funny moment where these musicians are speaking a little bit to Trinidad but in particular speaking to people that would be familiar with Jamaican folk music, or alternately, people that are expecting to hear Jamaican folk music. What we get then, at the beginning of the song, is we hear Iron Bar played by this group, set to a mento bubble rhythm, which sounds a little bit... It's like a calypso beat. After several measures, after they run through the theme of Iron Bar, they shift it to a standard swung jazz rhythm that appears much more often throughout the album. And going back to Eddie Harris, it's the same... It's the rhythm that he set Exodus to to signify his appropriation of it. And for the rest of that tune on the Jazz Jamaica record, their cover of Iron Bar, which they released as a song called Calypso Jazz, this is literally a back and forth, a dialogue in a sense, being performed by these musicians, between a musical conception of Jamaica or Jamaica in music, and a musical conception of something else, in this instance, being jazz.

**0:39:25.2 PS:** But it could also perhaps be understood as a moment when the musicians themselves were saying, "This is what we can do, this may be what you expect us to do. And we want to show you that we have the virtuosity to switch back and forth on a dime between these supposedly distinct genres. And now we have gotten that out of the way in the first track and for the rest of the track, we're gonna do jazz, which is what we came here to do in the first place." I don't know that for sure. Like you... I'm so glad you raised that point because I think that that track, aside from

Exodus, is really one of the more historically interesting ones.

**0:40:04.7 PO:** Well, it seems to me, the conversation that takes place between Calypso Jazz and then the track Exodus is a powerful conversation, but so, too, is the transnational conversation around Exodus itself, the different kind of iterations and how it all steams towards this intention, towards Jamaican independence. I wonder if you could say a little more about that kind of conversation, 'cause in one sense, it's clear from your research and your writing that the album itself wasn't a tremendous commercial success, though it has quite a legacy, it seems.

**0:40:42.6 PS:** Absolutely. I'll start in the more recent and try to work backward. But turn on a radio and you hear hip-hop music, turn on the television and hip-hop is being used to sell everything these days. Not to mention the fact that it has remained one of the more popular musical forms for young people for over a generation, for several generations now, worldwide, but especially in the Americas. Well, it's conventionally understood that hip-hop music, in its early pioneering years, in the 1970s, in the Bronx with Kool Herc and others, Kool Herc... Clive Campbell was a man who was born in Jamaica and whose innovations of playing two records at once and making breakbeats for people to dance to, which is the foundation of hip-hop music, was something that he understood, he learned by watching people play music very similarly in Jamaica. There's a Jamaican root of hip-hop music that we hear there, as well as that we will hear in samples. There is Jamaican reggae music, there's ska music, there's dancehall music, all kinds of different stuff that contributes to the palette that we hear in any hip-hop song.

**0:41:53.7 PS:** Taking a step back, though, this album helps us to understand not only some of the roots of contemporary music in terms of hip-hop, but also the roots of contemporary music in terms of more famous albums through which we associate music and Jamaica. Jamaica as a distinctive national entity is often associated, musically, at least with Bob Marley. And we see Time Magazine, for instance, having regarded Bob Marley's Exodus album as the album of the 20th century in the 1990s.

**0:42:25.6 PS:** In the song Exodus on that album, one can hear a bit of an echo of the original theme song coming from the Otto Preminger movie. But we hear it all in a reggae beat, we don't hear any jazz or something we would recognize as jazz. What we see, though, looking at Exodus and remembering that many of the musicians that served as Bob Marley's backing band when he was getting his career started, were members of this very community from which the Workshop group emerged. These were in effect, his musical uncles. These were people that were teaching Bob Marley and others lessons about arranging and composition, about being a musician.

**0:43:08.8 PS:** So the likelihood that they rubbed off on him is not in question, but what this album offers us is an audio piece of evidence to further understand how far back that relationship goes, how far back the role of certain musicians in Jamaica were having in injecting a political element into the music. It may even invigorate or reinvigorate our understanding of Bob Marley's radicalism, to imagine Exodus as being of a genealogical generation coming after this record Jazz Jamaica, which again, in my understanding, there are just so many signs that point to it being a product of the musicians themselves being interested in performing as well as cultivating an international, a transnational diasporic Black radical solidarity that played at the same time into the establishment of Jamaica's national sovereignty itself.

**0:44:12.9 PO:** Well, I think it's a tremendous story about what seems like maybe an easily or often overlooked artefact that then actually proves to be critical in terms of the legacy of not just Jamaican independence, but also popular culture worldwide, and really rooted in this transnational conversation over race and nationalism. So I'm so happy that you brought it to our attention and that we were able to have this great conversation, Ted. Thanks so much for joining us.

**0:44:44.5 PS:** Hey, thank you for having me, this has been really fun. Thank you.

**0:44:47.4 PO:** Good.

**0:44:50.3 S1:** That was Professor Kevin Lewis O'Neill in conversation with Professor Ted Sammons from the University of Toronto. On our next episode, we'll talk to Professor Nada Moumtaz and discuss the tension between religion and capitalism emerging from the reconstruction project in Beirut. Please subscribe on your favourite app so you won't miss it. This monthly podcast was brought to you by The Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies at the University of Toronto. Between, Across and Through is produced by Iane Romero. Thank you for listening and joining the conversation.