D. HART

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FOCUS ON MUSIC

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Woodshedding
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INTRODUCTION

"Every tone was a testimony against slavery"

The slaves selected to go to the Great House Farm, for the monthly allowance for themselves and their fellow-slaves, were peculiarly enthusiastic. While on their way, they would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness. They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune. The thought that came up, came out — if not in the word, in the sound; — and as frequently in the one as in the other. They would sometimes sing the most pathetic sentiment in the most rapturous tone, and the most rapturous sentiment in the most pathetic tone. Into all of their songs they would manage to weave something of the Great House Farm. Especially would they do this, when leaving home. They would then sing most exultingly the following words: —

"I am going away to
the Great House Farm!

O, yea! O, yea! O!"

This they would sing, as a chorus, to words which to many would seem unmeaning jargon, but which, nevertheless, were full of meaning to themselves. I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do.

I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs. I was myself within the circle; so that I neither saw nor heard as those without might see and hear. They told a tale of woe which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension; they were tones loud, long, and deep; they breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains. The hearing of those wild notes always depressed my spirit, and filled me with ineffable sadness. I have frequently found myself in tears while hearing them. The mere recurrence to those songs, even now, afflicts me; and while I am writing these lines, an expression of feeling has already found its way down my cheek. To those songs I trace my first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery. I can never get rid of that conception. Those songs still follow me, to deepen my hatred of slavery, and quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds. If any one wishes to be impressed with the soul-killing effects of slavery, let him go to Colonel Lloyd's plantation, and, on allowance-day, place himself in the deep pine woods, and there let him, in silence, analyze the sounds that shall pass through the chambers of his soul, — and if he is not thus impressed, it will only be because "there is no flesh in his obdurate heart."

I have often been utterly astonished, since I came to the north, to find persons who could speak of the singing, among slaves, as evidence of their contentment and happiness. It is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears. At least, such is my experience. I have often sung to drown my sorrow, but seldom to express my happiness. Crying for joy, and singing for joy, were alike uncommon to me while in the jaws of slavery. The singing of a man cast away upon a desolate island might be as appropriately considered as evidence of contentment and happiness, as the singing of a slave; the songs of the one and of the other are prompted by the same emotion.

Quote from the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* by Frederick Douglass.

Class Struggle in Music

AMIRI BARAKA

"The Saxophonist" by George Smith.

Class struggle in music is class struggle in the society, where the music is coming from anyway.

The creators (of the music) are/have been in the main the Afro-American workers and small farmers (particularly early blues). There has always been a sizeable sector of the black middle class contributing to the creation of the overall treasure chest of black music. But the mainstream has obviously been produced by the black majority.

This has been the case traditionally, historically. What has changed. (1) The wider class divisions that came into the Afro-American community with the greater wealth that came into that

Black music is the music the slaves created and their children. It is "low down" literally in society. Its players have, from day to day, the actual blues — it is not merely "a style."

Many black musicians got training that otherwise would have been inaccessible to them through the public schools — an opportunity that is being taken away with criminal cutbacks in inner city education.

community with World War II and again in the '60s — two periods of sharp black "upward social mobility" catalyzed by the struggle of the black majority; (2) the impact the creations of the black middle class have had since the 1940s on black music and inside U.S. culture generally.

Both aspects of this changed condition of black society (in the relationship of the black nation to the larger society) result from economic changes which create social motion. The dialectic of this situation though will show that World War II itself, on one level a struggle between imperialists, was also an anti-fascist war. The mobilization by U.S. imperialism involved employing black people at higher levels in the job market. (This happened also as World War I approached. It was this political/economic catalyst that helped move millions of African Americans out of the south and into the north; and moved those same millions from farms and small towns to factories and big cities — The Harlem Renaissance is another result.)

The '40s and '60s are more germane to this discussion of recent developments in the music, but part of the same general social (etc.) motion. By the end of the '60s what was clear is that there was a whole sector of black petty bourgeoisie who had grown to maturity increasingly disconnected from the main part of the African American community.

Even today some 89% of the African American people live in black communities. Those that live as minorities in white and other communities is still very small. (96% of African American people are workers, about 3% petty bourgeois.) Slavery created segregation, its continuation after slavery supposedly ended, created ghettos.

It was this wider separation that has developed between one sector of the black middle class and the majority of blacks that has caused the clear and significant emergence of what I call the "Tail Europe" school of black music.

There are now more and more blacks who live outside of the middle class mainstream of the black community. (Even though almost 90% of the blacks live in mainly black communities, mostly ghettos.)

This means there are more and more African Americans for whom "being black" is an *abstraction*, that they can relate to or not! A philosophical category they can "adopt" or reject, rather than the normal reality of their lives.

This is especially important if one understands that what has kept the African Americans out of melting pot America has been slavery and the segregation that it has projected even into this past part of the 20th century. Blacks have been *separated* from America as an "untouchable" group, despite liberal hype and official lies.

The general negativity and oppression of this segregation we know, but it is this "Nixed from America" reality that has made black music American yet *outside* it, at the same time.

What Sidney Finklestein points out in *Jazz: A Peoples Music* is that the European immigrants had to give up their culture as part of the "cost" of integrating into the melting pot. This is what we "see" now with the "Tail Europeans."

Elester Anderson.

Much of what goes advertised as "avant garde" is simply a regurgitation of contemporary European concert music. It is not *hot*. It does not *swing*. Its references, though sometimes couched in or purporting to raise up African, African American life, culture, mythology, etc., musically make more consistent reference, in its own structure and actual musical content, to Europe and its aesthetic.

The fact that someone might be "biologically" African American means *less* today socially in terms of who they will be in the world. Environment, and finally class identification, define who we are and what we want and will most likely do.

So that in the newest of the "new music" we see a struggle, made operative by the relationship the record companies, club owners, media star makers take toward the various kinds of music and musicians. Since there is no "equality of dispensation" to the musicians or their music but rather varying support for this player or style, more for this, less for that, based on the aesthetic of the money owners.

Any personal aesthetic is a reflection, in a general sense, of where one is in society. It is a verification of that place. A signature or abstraction, even made real, of the actual social and philosophical structure of society — ultimately of the economic and political structure and content.

Black music is the music the slaves created and their children. It is "low down" literally in society. Its players have, from day to day, the *actual* blues — it is not merely "a style."

For the "Tail Europeans," jazz or blues is usually a *style*, an exotic covering or reference. Their lives are "other" and the essence and feeling *in* their music squeals about this.

"White" blues and jazz, as a single admittedly somewhat abstract categorization is distinguishable in general because it is based on an appreciation or adaptation of the jazz aesthetic. (This is not to say that white players in the appropriate context are not impressive. It is just to insist that just as we can distinguish between German music and French music, we can also distinguish between African American music and white styles — in the main because they reflect a different aesthetic, reflective of a different *place* — and perception, rationale, experience, etc. — in society.)

So too the "Tail Europeans" reflect a sector of the black middle class (a white sector too) that needs Europe as its ultimate legitimizer and judge of their creative efforts. The official bourgeois culture of the U.S. still, for instance, must pay homage to Europe in a fashion that raises 18th century colonialism. As if George Washington and them didn't win that war! English departments still larger, in the main, than American Studies.

It is not that we are proselytizing for some "black purity" in the music. Cultural "purity" in anything sounds like backward cultural nationalism of one sort or another. But black music is an actual *genre*, which most impressive styles and works have not only been created by the African American people, but more importantly carry an aesthetic that is generally identifiable. For instance, it *swings* (is syncopated), it is *hot* (intense, rhythmic) even if it is presidentially insouciant. It is blues

■

The owners know what Confucius meant when he said that the people must not be permitted to hear the wrong music or the Empire will fall. The ideas in the mainstream of black music are democratic and revolutionary. They reflect the history and lives of the African American people. What else, in the main, could they be?

or bluesy or makes reference to blues (as life tone and cultural matrix, not just as form, despite formalist commentators like Martin Williams or Leonard Feather). It is improvised, and even its most Ducal arrangements and compositions provide room for or allow for improvisation.

But also its sound, its total art face, carries the lives, history, tradition, pain and hope, in the main, of the African American people, not accidentally or as a formal sterile hat tipping, but as a *result*, one significant result of all those categories. The music is one part of black life that identifies it as what it is, African-American.

The music, like the culture, has gathered everything it has moved through, past or over. It has borrowed and stolen like all cultures and art, specifically from French, English (Irish), Spanish, Native American cultures, all resting on the African, the slave, the freedperson, the segregated and discriminated against.

But its main reference is itself. It is African American expression, which is historic (i.e., historically accreted) in order to be "deep." As the African American nation came into being, between 1619 and the beginning of the 19th century, coming into existence as the collective product of people who have been (as Stalin points out) "historically constituted" with common language, land, economic life and psychological development; i.e., common culture.

The Tail Europeans and white players like them want to make black music's principal reference Europe: as its "art flair," its cutting edge. That's why such music generally is not bluesy, does not swing, is not hot, etc. It is, moreover, less funky than Beethoven!

At best this Tail Europe school (e.g., quickly, Braxton, Leo Smith, etc., Anthony Davis, alas, even aspects of the Art Ensemble and their clones all of whom would do well to at least give some deference to Sun Ra, much of Air) is a kind of interesting neo-European concert music. Many of the players suffer from bourgeois elitism that thinks that what they are doing is isolated for instance from black folks because it is too "heavy." Right on!!

They think if blacks knew what was

Sun Ra.

Arthur Blythe.

David Murray.

happening they would dig it. As one of the T.E.s said in *Coda* magazine, "Old jazz was for the feet, our music is for the head!" Such white chauvinism from a "negro" musician is embarrassing. But all middle class elites think that. However, there is an even colder portrait of some bloods for whom intellectual heaviness must be European. Wow! It is simply one mark of our national oppression.

Of course such music gets pushed by the pushers (media, corporations, etc.) as what's happening. People like Anthony Davis think those of us who dig JAZZ (dig that) are trying to keep him, them, etc., from "including all (they) know" — but that's not the case — my own problem is that they seem not to know *enough*. At least on the black side (at least not enough to make it *swing*!).

"All is permitted," to quote Raskolnikov, but what it is is what it is, not necessarily what you *say* it is! What is created can be understood and traced like anything that communicates!

Like we said, way before, most times you get the mood music of an emerging middle class.

Now as this Tail Europe avant appears and gets touted (as "3rd stream" and "Progressive Jazz" or cool before this), its existence predicts or is predicted by the re-emerging voice of an authentic hot jazz avant. Just as Bop called forth cool and cool in turn by its attempt at aesthetic (and social, etc.) revisionism caused Hard Bop to appear as its antidote in the '50s, so today as the T.E.s reached their pinnacle of promotion and prominence the so-called "Avant Gut Bucket" or vice versa, jumped out.

It would seem that young players like David Murray, Arthur Blythe are the spearheads. Ironically, David Murray has been related to the T.E.s to a certain extent, but his playing and compositions are much hotter dan any of dat.

The group World Saxophone Quartet seems a perfect example of the class struggle going on in the music. In a sense, at their best, this group carries the two aspects of this contradiction and at some point the tension between, say, the funk, i.e., David Murray and Hamiet Bluiett and the more T.E.-oriented Julius Hemphill and Oliver Lake.

But often the manqué cerebral *writtenness* of Hemphill's vision caused World Saxophone Quartet to sound like the typical "T.E." group. Murray's octet and big band (and even his string groups) give him the vehicles he needs to begin to fully explore what state of the art absolutely contemporary *hot music* should sound like. His dates at Sweet Basil in New York City confirm this. (Also get *Murray's Steps, Home,* etc.)

Blythe's more "experimental" band with tubas and cellos finally left heat for posture and formalism but his quartets with John Hicks absolutely smoke.

Henry Threadgill, the de facto leader of Air, is a complex personality and Air was a very interesting and often engaging group — but many times it was in the chamber.

But that group also boasted two of the finest instrumentalists of our time, Fred Hopkins, bass, and Steve McCall, drums. The breakup of Air, after some ten years, showed something about the class struggle as well as its resolution

Afrika Bambaataa.

John Gilmore.

Pharoah Sanders.

on higher levels.

Threadgill's sextet, which has been his main vehicle of recent is a much superior group, hotter and more swinging. The band is obviously influenced by Murray's big band and octets, but it is a positive influence for sure.

It is equally positive to see Threadgill's sextet add to the ranks of the hot, and led by David Murray's groups weight the class struggle to the side of hot jazz.

Musicians like Pharoah Sanders' wildly liberating groups, including pianist John Hicks, bassist Ray Drummond and drummer Idris Muhammad or Eddie Blackwell, newcomer, Greg Bandy, the "new" Sun Ra, who now plays anthologies of the classics — Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Charlie Parker has assumed the role already of the great bridge of music history — surging hotter than ever. John Gilmore and Marshall Allen continue to be among the most amazing players on any scene. These musicians build up the reemergence of the hot.

Not so strangely many of the T.E.s

Georgia Sea Island Singers.

Bessie Smith.

(Left) Stevie Wonder. (Below) Leadbelly.

when they want to swing swing over to a fusion that sounds veddy "white." EW & F wipe any of that.

Many of the players in Murray's groups play in Threadgill's sextet, and quite a few of these young players have hard swinging groups of their own. Trumpeter, Olu Dara's, various Okra orchestras definitely uphold the hot — likewise trombonist Craig Harris (see notes for *Aboriginal Affairs*).

But even so, the legion of anti-jazz publicists will try to raise up the vapid and the tepid, the ersatz, and the imitation, just as they always do, pushing the non-hot mood music of a new wave of petty bourgeois T.E.s. They will also push so-called fusion which is 1980s cool — more ersatz anti-consciousness music, which seeks not only to divert us from the actual, but coopt popular funk on the way in.

The commercial and media prominence of Rock (a white appropriation of black rhythm and blues) is yet another manifestation of the class struggle. Racism, most obviously, will always see that white musical styles, even those in direct imitation of black styles are pushed by the official pushers. These are called in the music business, "Covers" (Remember they even tried to keep Michael Jackson off of MTV.)

But there is another aspect to this we should not miss; viz, that because of the separation of people in a racist society, much of the white rock is more "commercial" by virtue of the fact that the ideas it pushes are less progressive, less injurious to the status quo. There are even many leading punk and heavy metal groups, in particular, that could be KKK marching bands. (Compare, for instance, the general philosophy of Rap, I should say now, black Rap, not only to white appropriations of the genre but to the general level of ideas in white rock.)

Black rap, a popular child of the hot '60s black revolutionary poetry scene (e.g., Spirit House Movers, Last Poets — both the original and the later better known version; Gylan Kain, Yusef Rahman, David Nelson) still carries elements of black democratic struggle. "It's like a jungle out here . . ." "Don't push me" — Grandmaster Flash.

But commercial carriers must op-

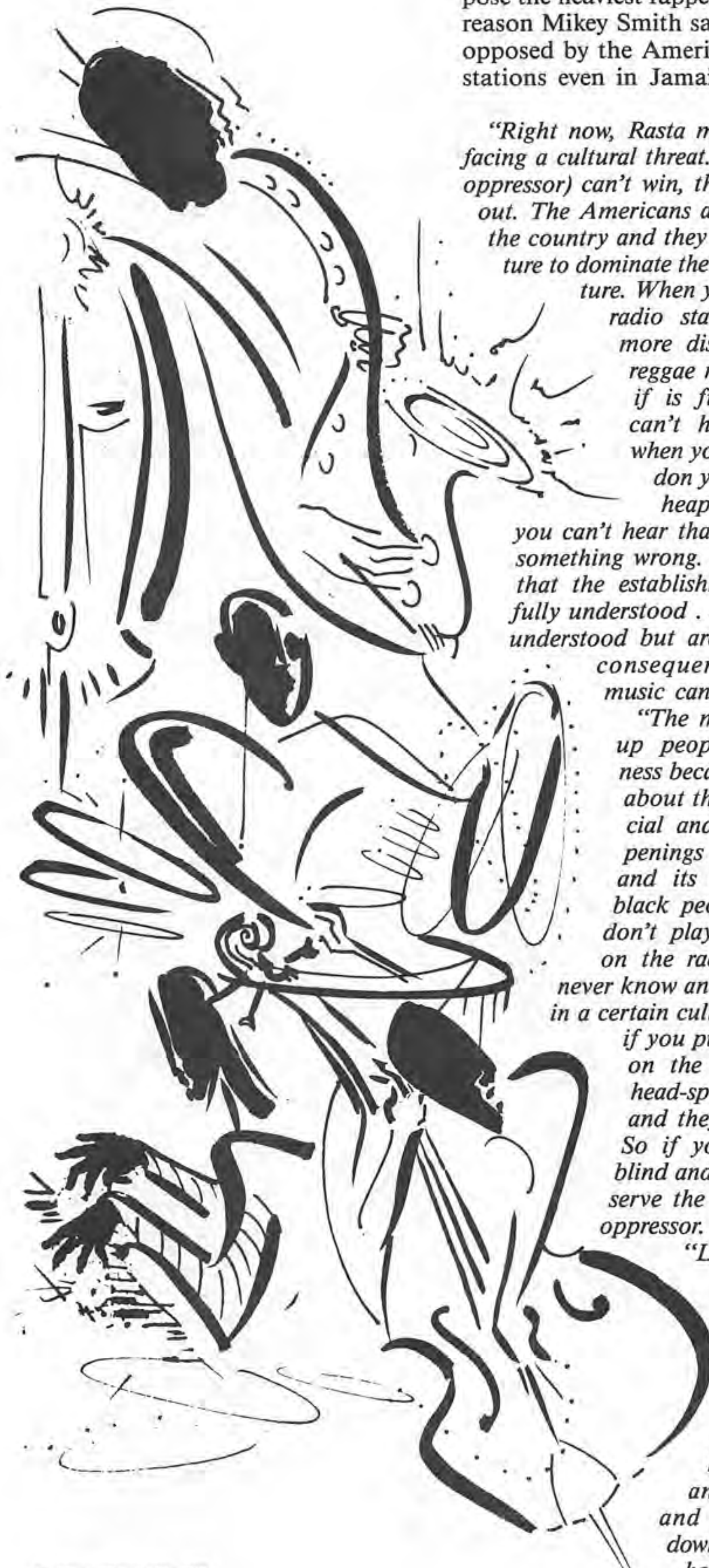
Let the work songs and spirituals or Louis or Leadbelly or Bessie Smith or Duke or Lady Day, Bird, or Monk or Trane or Stevie or Sassy play in our schools everyday. . . . and watch the radical change.

Duke Ellington.

John Coltrane.

Billie Holiday.

pose the heaviest rappers for the same reason Mikey Smith said Reggae was opposed by the American controlled stations even in Jamaica itself!



By Ademola Olugebefola, 1984

"Right now, Rasta man in Jamaica facing a cultural threat. But them (the oppressor) can't win, they can't get us out. The Americans are coming into the country and they want their culture to dominate the indigenous culture. When you listen to the radio station you hear more disco music that reggae music, and that if is fuckry . . . you can't have that. But when you come to London you hear a whole heap of Rockers . . . you can't hear that in JamDown, something wrong. So it show you that the establishment have not fully understood . . . or they have understood but are afraid of the consequences that the music can have.

"The music will build up people's consciousness because it is talking about the particular social and political happenings in the country and its relationship to black people. So if you don't play certain music on the radio people will never know and will be locked in a certain cultural bind. Now if you put certain music on the radio, people's head-space will open up and they'll start to see. So if you keep people blind and ignorant it will serve the interests of the oppressor.

"Like American music, for example. When you listen to some of the contents it's love and love and love and boogie-down and shake-down and more boogie-down. And you don't hear what's happening in terms of the (racist) 'moral majority' in the music. You never hear about what is happening with the Ku Klux Klan. There are artist who talk about the 'moral majority' and the Ku Klux Klan but you don't hear them on the airwave. So it can be used a divisive method so that people just think that it's pure party and shake-down and boogie-down, and everything's all right and everything's great and have a senselessness as such that reduce people to nothing, naught, zero."

— excerpt from reprinted "Interview with Michael Smith," *The Black Nation*, Summer/Fall 1984.

Even within the precincts of black popular music (which is always a form of blues) we can observe class struggle and even the use now of black "covers" for works or artists the corporations don't want to push.

The recent surge to mind boggling celebrity of Michael Jackson was a carefully orchestrated cover to obscure the great Stevie Wonder, because Wonder had offended the owners by using his art so Wonder/fully in the African American struggle for democracy. Particularly around the battle for Dr. King's holiday!

You could see this coming way down the pike. Not only did Michael Jackson cop Stevie's style (with the production Svengali-ism of Quincy Jones, part of the *Mod Squad*) but the injection of new-wave Rock effects and Michael's complete change of appearance into an androgynous lama loving non-threatening wind up toy for the teeny boppers of all ages, he could be used not only to cover Stevie but revitalize the pop industry which had the bottom drop out of it earlier because they were pushing too many covers and not enough substance. (3 white boys of any description, with no known talent, as long as they dressed or looked funny or had some other gimmick could get a record asap — But ultimately *Gresham's law* went into effect and the covers just sat.) But Michael Jackson *is* a great performer and he can dance his ass off!

Michael Jackson not only sold 49 million copies of *Thriller* — 7 platinum records. *Off The Wall*, earlier, had 3 platinums, raising Columbia

records off the floor. He could be used on the fly to try to pump life — figuratively speaking — into Brooke Shields' fortunes.

The sweet irony is that when Michael tried to get a black producer (Don King*) for the "Victory" tour with his family, not only did the Biggies stop this and impose themselves within the profit-making apparatus of that tour, bad mouthing the tour right up until they could get their paws in, but now they've since tried to pump up the bilious looking grease ball, Prince as, dig it, Michael's challenger to the almighty top spot. *A cover for a cover*?!

(Prince, an androgynous colored porno p-rock person, with no family or religious restrictions on his merriment, has already had a movie, *Purple Rain*, and loads of ink. But that ain't the mainstream. Plus, like I tolt ya, M.J. can dance his ass off. Prince is clumsy.)

But all this to point out how class struggle, war between classes and their interests, the struggle of ideas, rages within the music world. And, as usual, it is the people versus the bourgeoisie. The *owners* of the music business and their middle managers and scribblers are the peoples' enemies.

Unfortunately, we do not have the journals and publications and venues (clubs, concert series, cultural and artistic organizations) we need to adequately intensify our struggle against the owners. They shoot their lies and distortions and covers at us from all directions. (Notice how quickly; e.g., music videos, are noxious reactionary chauvinist — racial and sexual — non-entertainments.)

The owners know what Confucius meant when he said that the people must not be permitted to hear the wrong music or the Empire will fall. The ideas in the mainstream of black music are democratic and revolutionary. They reflect the history and lives of the African American people. What else, in the main, could they be?

The class struggle in music is a manifestation of our fight for democracy opposed by the racist owners of society. Let the work songs and spirituals or Louis or Leadbelly or Bessie Smith or Duke or Lady Day, Bird, or Monk or Trane or Stevie or Sassy play in our schools everyday. Let the children hear our history, our traditions, the history of revolutionary democratic struggle — whether black, brown, or beige or "God Bless the Child" or "Impressions" and watch the radical change. There are progressive ideas in that music. Ideas the keepers of the status quo cannot allow to be spread through society at large, especially not to the people on the bottom, the African Americans.

That's why the most advanced music in society, African American Improvised music, can only be played very sparsely and selectively and even the R & B stations are winnowed down to a minimum and the music on them pointed mainly at the "non-disruptive" top 40s funk-pablum.

A people struggling for liberation even sing about that process. They sing and play that stuff all the time. The opposition to this is what creates class struggle. Dig It! ■

Amiri Baraka
Rome, September 7, 1984

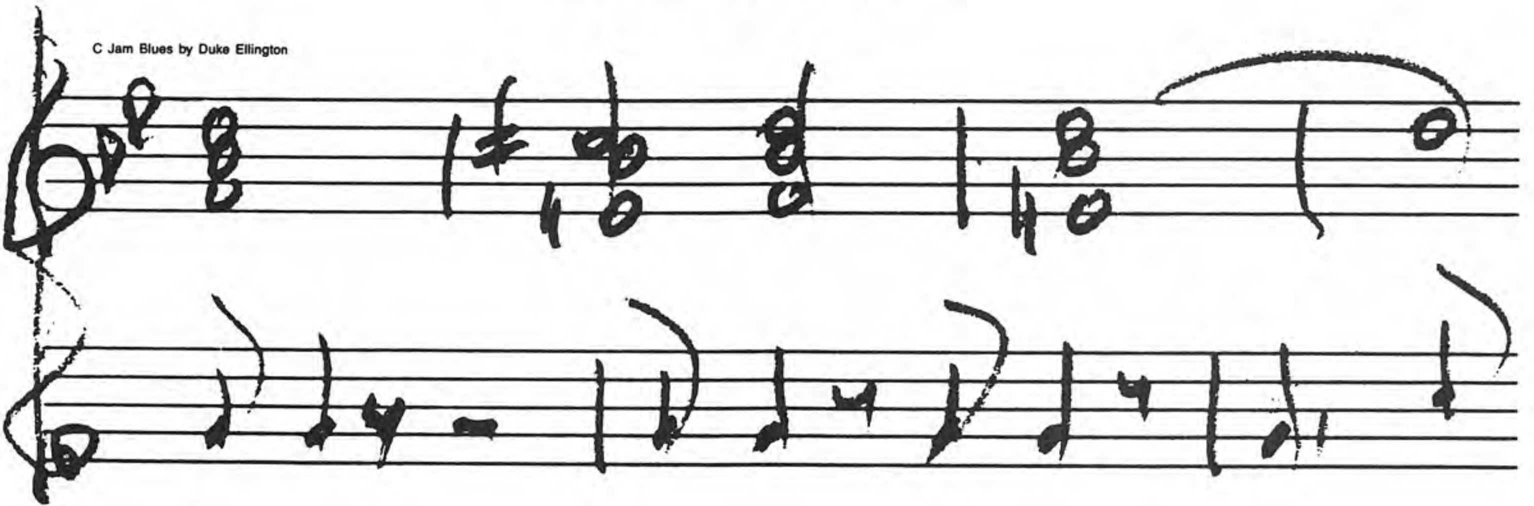
* (Indicted since this writing for tax evasion!)

Mahalia Jackson

The Afro-American Musician

Messengers of a Unique Sensibility in Western Culture

PLAYTHELL G. BENJAMIN



NO SINGLE DEVELOPMENT in the history of modern culture surpasses — both in artistic achievement and cultural effect — that of the musical tradition created by the Afro-American musician. The artistic vanguard of a people only a half century removed from three centuries of chattel slavery, they mobilized the cultural resources of the folk and fashioned a golden legacy of song and dance of such power and appeal that it has enriched the cultures of the world; particularly that geographical and cultural sphere

The elements that comprise what I refer to as the Afro-American . . . sensibility are: a triumphant spirituality; an exuberant emotional expression; an unaffected sensuality; the ability to confront life's adversities with grace and dignity i.e., maintain one's cool; and a deep and abiding sense of the value of human freedom.

commonly referred to as the Western World: achievement all the more remarkable when one considers the fact that it was accomplished in the context of a society at once culturally arrogant and insecure, predatory in its economic practices, and crudely racist in its social attitudes.

Today the popular dance music of all Western societies — and indeed most non-Western societies — is rooted in the rhythm and blues tradition. The most popular listening music of young whites, hard rock, is based in the blues; and, excepting those who have chosen to carry on the legacy of the European classical tradition, all serious instrumentalists are attempting to work in the wondrous improvisational genres introduced by such early players as Louis Armstrong, Sidney Bechet, and "Jelly Roll" Morton, and extended by later innovators such as John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie, Charles "Yard Bird" Parker, Maxwell C. Roach, Thelonious Monk, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Charles Christian, and legions of others.

The elements that comprise what I refer to as the Afro-American (by Afro-American, I am referring to Black folk in the U.S.A.) sensibility are: a triumphant spirituality; an exuberant emotional expression; an unaffected sensuality; the ability to confront life's adversities with grace and dignity, i.e., maintain one's cool; and a deep and abiding sense of the value of human freedom. It is this sensibility that informs the style and substance of that unique body of music universally recognized as the product of the Afro-American imagination. The genres of Afro-American music that have become so influential on a world scale — City blues, Jazz and Rhythm and Blues — had their roots in earlier forms of Black American music. The most important of these earlier forms was the spiritual, the sacred music of the slave community.

That this music was informed by ancient African musical traditions which challenged the limits of European musical formulation is a matter of record. Consider the report on Afro-American slave music written by Lucy McKinn Gamson, a white abolitionist with musical training, who attempted to transcribe the singing of Blacks, heard in the South in 1862, by using conventional methods of notation.

"And what makes it all the harder to unravel a thread of melody out of this strange network is that, like birds, they seem not infrequently to strike sounds that cannot be precisely represented by the gamut, and abound in slides from one note to another, and furies and cadences not in articulated notes. It is difficult to express the entire character of these Negro ballads by mere musical notes and signs. The odd turns made in the throat, and the curious rhythmic effect produced by single voices chiming in at different irregular intervals are as impossible to place on a score as the singing of birds or the tones of the Aeolian Harp."

This confession of confusion by a white observer trying to grasp the musical implications of Afro-American innovation would be often repeated with each new departure from Western convention in the evolution of Afro-American music.

The spirituals represent the music of a people living under extreme oppression, undergoing forced acculturation and yet retaining elements of their former cultures. This can be demonstrated by observing the performance style and lyrical content of the spiritual song. Based in the imagery of the Old Testament and concerned with such themes as freedom, justice, and deliverance from bondage, they are unquestionably the lyrical product of the African experience in America. After listening to renditions of these songs — probably by the Fisk Jubilee Singers — Dr. W.E.B. DuBois wrote in a 1903 essay entitled "Of the Sorrow Songs,"

"What are these songs and what do they mean? I know little of music and can say nothing in technical phrase, but I know something of men, and knowing them, I know that these songs are the articulate message of the slave to the world. They are the music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment; they tell of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways."

And the Doctor might have added, of the ultimate triumph of the human spirit.

In his book, *The Roots of Black Music*, the distinguished African musicologist Dr. Asherati Kebede has written about the distinctly African featues of the spirituals,

"The social implications of music remain the same in both African and Afro-American cultures. Spirituals were sung both in and out of church: at births, baptisms, meetings, and while cooking, sewing, and celebrating annual holidays and festivals such as New Year's and Christmas."

In regard to the performance style of Afro-American Sacred Music, Kebede traces its dynamism to African sources:

"Antiphonal and responsorial singing, the use of vocal slides, moans, groans, and shouts accompanied by dance and hand-clapping, the practice of possession and body jerks, jumps, and convulsions are all important characteristics common to both Afro-American and sub-Saharan African music."

Dr. Kebede comments directly on a religious practice that was recorded by many observers of Afro-American religious practices in the deep South,

"The Ring Shout, which provides a therapeutic release of repressed emotions as well as satisfies the needs of religious ritual, is undoubtedly a carryover of the circle dance traditions of West Africa."

Even when they were performing songs from the standard hymnals of the white church, the renditions of these tunes took on a decidedly different character. Whites who witnessed these performances by Black slaves and recorded their observations invariably speak of the dynamic power of their performance. The Reverend Samuel Davies, a white minister who preached to congregations of blacks and whites in Virginia as early as 1747, wrote:

"The negroes, above all the human species that I ever knew, have an ear for music and a kind of ecstatic delight in psalmody."

He described the voices in their racially-restricted section as,

" . . . breaking out in a torrent of sacred harmony, enough to bear the whole congregation away to heaven."

The Rev. Lucius Bellinger reports on a Methodist meeting held in South Carolina in the 1820s,

"The crowd continues to increase and song after song climbs the hills of heaven . . . The negroes are out in great numbers, and sing with voices that make the woods ring."

In an interview some years after slavery, an ex-slave recalled that,

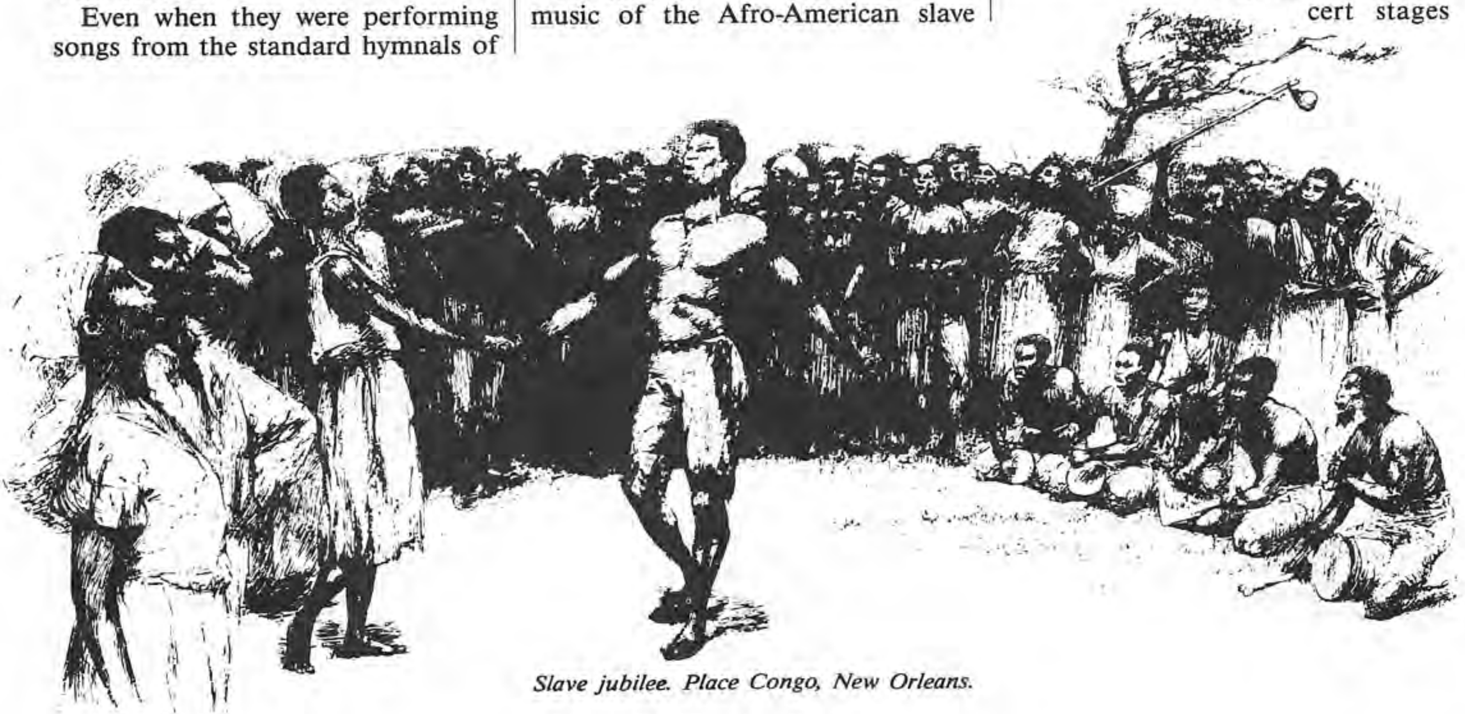
"Our white folks, when they have camp meeting, would have the colored come up and sing over all the mourners. You know, they still say the colored can beat the whites singing."

As early as the 1870s, the sacred music of the Afro-American slave

The most important of these earlier forms was the spiritual, the sacred music of the slave community.

community found its way to the concert stages of America and Europe, to the citadels of a western culture, where it inspired a quite atypical wave of critical eloquence and passion.

It should be noted that the spirituals had been altered and refashioned in several important respects by the time they reached the concert stages



Slave jubilee. Place Congo, New Orleans.

It is a striking paradox, even for a country whose history is nothing but paradox, that it was sons and daughters of slaves, singing the songs of their ancestors, who presented to the world the first great art form inspired by the American experience and born on American soil.

of America and Europe. In her path-breaking study, "The Music of Black Americans," Dr. Eileen Southern explains,

"The postwar spirituals, like the social songs, employed the old forms and musical idioms of the slave songs, but the content of these songs reflected the new status of the singers and the different circumstances under which they lived. The growing importance of the railroad in the lives of black men, for example, revealed itself in the number of songs that included phrases about 'getting on board the gospel train.'"

There were other important changes such as the fact that these songs were originally carried to the concert stage by a group of formally trained singers known as the "Fisk Jubilee Singers." After a fledgling start, they were invited to perform at a giant extravaganza in Boston, billed as the World Peace Jubilee in 1872. They received enthusiastic applause and excellent reviews.

Dr. Southern wrote about the importance of this event to the subsequent career of the Fisk Jubilee Singers,

"The reputation of the Fisk Jubilee Singers was made! They went on to sing at places in the United States that had never before heard the black man's Folk music — before crowned heads of Europe and before the common people in Germany, Switzerland and Great Britain. Everywhere the singers 'carried their audiences by storm' and won acclaim from the critics. Within seven years, they raised $150,000, a tremendous sum for those days, and turned it over to the University to help with the erection of a new building, called Jubilee Hall, on campus."

It is a striking paradox, even for a country whose history is nothing but paradox, that it was the sons and daughters of slaves, singing the songs of their ancestors, who presented to the world the first great art form inspired by the American experience and born on American soil.

To all who heard this music, it was clear that something new was happening in American culture. During this period many Afro-American musicians found work in the pits in the black minstrel shows that played all over the country. The musicians who performed in these shows were trained in conventional European instrumental technique, for often there was no time for the band to rehearse and the musicians were expected to interpret the score on the spot. The songs in these shows fell into three categories: comedy songs, ballads, and specialty tunes. The most popular songwriters with the black minstrels were the Afro-American songwriters: James Bland, Gussie Davis, and Samuel Davis. There was one white songwriter highly favored by black minstrels, Stephen Foster. However, Foster, perhaps the first great American popular songwriter, is best remembered for his songs composed in an Afro-American style such as "Old Black Joe" and "Old Folks at Home." James Bland, composer of such enduring songs as "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny," adopted in 1940 as the Virginia State Anthem, and "Dem Golden Slippers," spent many years in Europe as a highly acclaimed musician.

By the turn of the century, another Afro-American form, Ragtime, was the rage of this country, and was winning wide acceptance in Europe. Pianist-composer Scott Joplin was the most widely imitated musician in the country by 1898, when "Maple Leaf Rag" was the most popular song in the nation. It is my contention that what whites found most attractive in Afro-American music and the accompanying dances, is a sense of freedom that was virtually unknown in an overly organized, repressive society still

From "Lift Every Voice and Sing" by James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson

under the influence of Puritan values. It is a strange historical irony that white Americans should look to their black countrymen, the most oppressed segment of American society, in search of the deepest expressions of freedom. However, when one reads the personal testaments of white artists who opted for careers performing Afro-American music, the theme of personal liberation is constantly reiterated.

The reception of Ragtime was both predictable and prophetic of things to come: While the American public found the syncopated rhythms of Ragtime music infectious, and legions of pianists of all stripes found its challenges irresistible, the cultural and religious establishment looked on in horror and quickly pushed the panic button. The vanguard of the original opposition to the growing influence of Afro-American instrumental music was the National Federation of Music Clubs. These clubs were devoted to the propagation of European Concert music in America, and were completely supported by the nation's Certified Music Teachers, who numbered over 100,000 by the first decade of the twentieth century. The membership clubs affiliated with the National Federation exceeded the number of music teachers by several hundred thousand, and represented a powerful force for musical censorship.

What ensued can only be properly described as a cultural Cold War, in which the Euro-American cultural establishment perceived the most cherished values of European culture to be under assault by the "inferior, savage" sensibility propagated through Afro-American music and dance. The virulence of the invective hurled against this embryonic art form speaks most eloquently to this point. Phillip Gordon, a recognized piano teacher, writing in a 1913 edition of the influential journal *The Musical Observer*, advised musicians to "shun Ragtime music as you would the Black Death." Note the equation of Black music with the deadly Bubonic Plague. Preachers and physicians publicly declared that Afro-American dance music caused drunkenness and sexual excess, and was surely the work of the devil. Francis Toye, a leading British music critic, published an essay titled "Ragtime, The New Fanaticism," in which he argued that the music "shows precisely the kind of vitality associated with a revivalism peculiar to the Negro! What need have we of further witness? For of all hysteria that particular semi-religious hysteria is nearer to madness than any other."

Most members were either born in slavery or first generation freedmen: The Fisk Jubilee Singers.

The attitude of the self-appointed arbiters of proper musical taste is perhaps best stated by Theodore Thomas, a leading American symphonic con-

ductor and passionate advocate of German concert music.

"A symphony orchestra shows the culture of a community. . . . The man who does not understand Beethoven and has not been under his spell has not lived half his life."

This statement reflects the mind set of a pompous Europhile; firmly convinced of the inferiority of American culture in general and the particular vulgarity of Afro-American music. The national self-deprecation inherent in such a cultural ideology reflects the fundamental insecurity spawned by the identity crisis of a people no longer European, yet unable to accept essential elements of the new American culture. Yet it was only by coming to terms with the realities of the American cultural milieu that one could hope to fashion a new art that was truly American in inspiration, style and content.

While this rather obvious fact escaped the intellectual grasp of Theodore Thomas and others of his ilk, it was abundantly clear to the distinguished European composer, Antonín Dvorák. In 1892, he came from Bohemia to serve as director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York City. In that capacity, he met a brilliant Afro-American student named Harry T. Burleigh, who introduced him to the folk music of black America. Eileen Southern describes the effect of this experience on the musical activities of Dvorák:

"Within three months of his arrival, Dvorák had begun work on a Symphony, From the New World (No. 5 in E Minor), that employed themes invented in the spirit of Negro and Indian folk melodies."

On the eve of the work's debut in 1893, Dvorák offered the following commentary:

"These beautiful and varied themes are the product of the soil. They are American. They are the folksongs of America, and your composers must turn to them. In the Negro melodies of America I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music."

This recognition of the innovative and vitalizing potential of Afro-American music by a European master musician was possible because he was able to observe these matters from the vantage point of a disinterested outsider, secure in his native cultural traditions, and relatively unaffected by the rabid racism of late 19th century America. After all, when this statement was made, Afro-Americans were being publicly lynched at the rate of one every two and a half days!

Antonín Dvorák went on to compose two other works based on themes in the Afro-American folk idiom: The American Quartet (Op. 96) and a work for Quintet (Op. 97). Several native American composers, white and black, followed Dvorák's advice and set to work producing a series of compositions, European in form and structure, but of Afro-American inspiration and theme. Among the most successful black American composers working in this genre were: Harry T. Burleigh, R. Nathaniel Dett, Clarence Cameron White, and John Wesley Work, Sr., whose arrangements of the spirituals shaped the style of the modern (twen-

(Center) Scott Joplin. (Left and right) Sheet music of Joplin compositions.

From "Heliotrope Bouquet" by Scott Joplin and Louis Chauvin

tieth century) Fisk Jubilee Singers. The most successful composer in this genre remains William Grant Still, author of the Afro-American Symphony and several operas among other works. The black British composer, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, also composed works based on Afro-American themes.

These attempts to create new American music by utilizing Afro-American themes in European formal structures, though a noble experiment, were essentially new wine in old bottles and were destined to be eclipsed by the more authentically American music being created by an avante garde of black musicians.

These musicians were venturing out in wholly uncharted artistic waters, heading for undiscovered provinces in the world of music. In the black communities of New Orleans, Memphis, Chicago, and New York, the first three decades of the twentieth century witnessed a wave of creativity unprecedented in any area of American art. For here Afro-American musicians introduced a unique musical language that was really something new under the Western sun.

Working within a tradition that prized complex polyrhythms, antiphony, polyphony, improvisation, and the varied expressive devices of the Afro-American vocal tradition, these cultural alchemists created an instrumental music that would evolve into a fine art form in an extraordinarily short period of time. The music created by such artists as King Oliver, W.C. Handy, Louis Armstrong, James Reese Europe, Jelly Roll Morton, Duke Ellington, Noble Sissle, Willie "The Lion" Smith, Scott Joplin, Earl "Fatha" Hines, Andy Kirk, Jimmy Moore, James P. Johnson, "Fats" Waller, Johnny Dodds, et al., is as representative of the American Ethos, as the music of Beethoven, Bach and Wagner is reflective of a German sensibility; or in the way that Rossini, Puccini, and Giuseppe Verdi communicate the spirit of Italian culture.

In its social organization and philosophy, Afro-American instrumental music is democratic, experimental, and committed to individual freedom.

The essence of this achievement was the creation of an art form which is Neo-African in its aesthetic features, etymologically Western, and quintessentially American. Cultural theorist, historian, and critic Albert Murray, writing in an essay titled "The Blues Idiom and the Mainstream," explores the importance of this development,

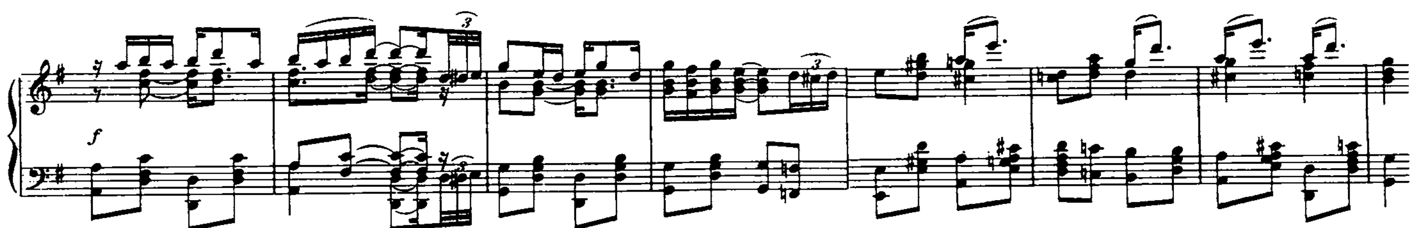
"The creation of an art style is, as most anthropologists would no doubt agree, a major cultural achievement. In fact, it is perhaps the highest as well as the most comprehensive fulfillment of culture; for an art style, after all, reflects nothing so much as the ultimate synthesis and refinement of a lifestyle."

On the creative process itself, Professor Murray offers this bit of enlightened observation,

"Art is by definition a process of stylization; and what it stylizes is experience. What it objectifies, embodies, abstracts, expresses, and symbolizes is a sense of life."

In its social organization and philosophy, Afro-American instrumental music is democratic, experimental, and committed to individual freedom. Hence, it is the artistic embodiment of the American ideal as filtered through the black American sensibility. This fact, complemented by its organic relationship to dance, accounts for the great popularity of this music among artist and layman, white and black, for most of its history. By the second decade of the twentieth century, Afro-American instrumental and vocal music had become the prized idiom of performance by serious white artists looking for an alternative to European concert music. When one examines the attitudes and motivations of some of the most serious of these, it is abundantly clear that they were in search of a medium through which to explore the limits of creative innovation and technical virtuosity in ways not possible within the authoritarian orthodoxy of European classical tradition. For others, black music became the avenue to psycho-spiritual emancipation.

The first wholly improvisational ensemble music, commonly referred to as jazz, was developed in the black community of New Orleans and carried up the Mississippi by its creators. This music retained the essentially African polyrhythms, antiphony and polyphony, while assimilating such European elements as the eight tone scale, chords, and harmony. To these features were added the Afro-American penchant for improvisation and the idiomatic uniqueness of the blues. Of all Afro-American musical



styles, the blues is the most pervasive in providing the emotional content of music sacred and profane. Musically, the blues consists of the tonic, subdominant, and dominant chords arranged to suit the lyrical text of the twelve bar song. For many years, and encompassing several styles, jazz song would remain firmly rooted in the blues.

The origin of the blues, including the word itself, is uncertain although it appears to be a post-Emancipation development. But one thing is certain: Neither W.C. Handy, the "Father of the Blues," who introduced this form into musical literature, nor Ma Rainey, its first star performer, can lay claim to having invented it. The blues began as the secular folk song of rural southern Blacks and was polished to a high degree of sophistication by great composers and performers residing in the large cities. Handy said he first heard the blues sung by "a lean, loose-jointed Negro" in a Mississippi train station in 1903. He described the man's face as "reflecting the sadness of the ages." Ma Rainey claims to have first heard the music a year earlier, in 1902, performed by a girl lamenting the loss of a lover. At the time, Ma Rainey was a professional performer in the famous Rabbit Ears Minstrel Show — a show that is resurrected in rich detail by Alice Childress in her novel, *A Short Walk*.

Ralph Ellison offers this assessment of the meaning of the blues:

"The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy, but by squeezing from it a near tragic, near comic lyricism."

These features of the blues idiom attest to its power to evoke catharsis in both performer and listener and also explain its universal appeal. For what we have in the blues is an art that speaks to the human condition in a particularly direct and moving way, an art that reflects the Afro-American sensibility in early 20th century America, and the Afro-American response to U.S. conditions.

In the world of the practicing Afro-American musician, ragtime, blues and jazz were not separate musical entities. Rather, they were often combined in various ways in the same musical performance. For instance, Buddy Bolden, the pioneer New Orleans jazz trumpeter, referred to his group as a "ragtime band," and there is no doubt that his music contained all the wails, shrieks, moans, shouts, screams, growls, and melancholy sobs associated with the blues. This was certainly true of King Oliver's band and was strikingly evident in the instrumental and vocal style of the first great jazz soloist, Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong.

" . . . the blues is an art that speaks to the human condition in a particularly direct and moving way, . . . that reflects the Afro-American . . . response to U.S. conditions."

The effect that this music had on the larger society was profound and would, for generations, transform the musical taste and alter the lifestyles of millions of white Americans and Europeans. The revolution in mass communications that produced the radio and phonograph brought the music within the reach of everyone and routinely placed sound portraits of the Afro-American lifestyle and sensibility in the most intimate contact with multitudes of whites who had never met a Black person.

For Milton "Mezz" Mezzrow, a Jewish Chicagoan, it was while serving a prison term in Pontiac, Michigan, around 1913 that he first heard

the blues. His description of the experience suggests that it was much akin to a religious revelation. In his memoir, *Really the Blues*, he recounts:

"During those months I got me a solid dose of the colored man's gift for keeping the life and spirit in him while he tells of his troubles in music. I heard the blues for the first time, sung in low mournful chants, morning, noon and night."

He goes on to describe the personal transformation he experienced as a result of exposure to Afro-American music:

"By the time I reached home, I knew that I was going to spend all of my time from then on sticking close to Negroes. They were my kind of people. And I was going to learn their music and play it for the rest of my days. I was going to be a musician, a Negro musician, hipping the world about the blues the way only Negroes can."

With that, he picked up his clarinet and began a lifetime of study. The evidence suggests that Mezzrow's experience was not unique among white musicians who opted to perform in the Afro-American idiom.

Interestingly, the first white bands of importance in the modern American improvisational tradition developed in New Orleans and Chicago, precisely the two venues where the Afro-American masters worked out the aesthetic formulae that resulted in the creation of jazz. The famous "Chicago School" of jazz produced a group of the most outstanding white musicians in the history of U.S. music. Among its luminaries are Hoagy Carmichael, "Bix" Beiderbecke, Benny Goodman, Victor Berton, "Mezz" Mezzrow, Gene Krupa, Eddie Condon, Jimmy McPartland, and Muggsy Spanier. Ironically, many of these white musicians first heard black music played by white imitators of the real thing. There were two very popular white bands from New Orleans in the early years of Jazz. These musicians had thoroughly studied what their black colleagues were doing in New Orleans and assiduously copied all they heard. Given the rigidly segregated society in the South, the black musicians' movements were restricted while whites were free to patronize black cabarets in search of original ideas, then return to the cloistered environs of white America to pretend that they were the true authors.

The two most famous of these white New Orleans groups were: the Original Dixieland Jazz Band and the New Orleans Rhythm Kings. The Original Dixieland Jazz Band was founded by a New Orleans Italian named Nick LaRocca, and in 1917, became the first band to record the black Jazz style for which that city is world renowned. LaRocca, a cornetist, formed a combo which consisted of: Daddy Edwards (trombone), Tony Sabaro (drums), Andy Ragas (piano), and Larry Shields (clarinet). This was the standard instrumentation for New Orleans Jazz bands, minus the banjo and tuba. To be sure, the name chosen by LaRocca is pretentious and certainly misleading, given their insignificant role in the development of the New Orleans style.

The real importance of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band lay in the fact that they were the first band to be recorded playing Jazz. Consequently, it was through them that white America was introduced to this Afro-American innovation in Western music. The circumstances that led to their pioneer role in the developing record

Louis Armstrong, 1932.

industry is largely a matter of historical coincidence.

On January 26, 1917, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band opened for a series of performances at Reisenweber's Cafe, located near Columbus Circle in Midtown Manhattan. This was a fashionable spot frequented by a high society crowd who were accustomed to quite different musical fare. After a couple of weeks, they were attracting capacity crowds and they were instant stars. *Variety* magazine described their reception,

"There is one thing that is certain, and that is that the melodies as played by the Jazz organization at Reisenweber's are quite conducive to making the dancers on the floor loosen up and go quite the limit in their stepping."

Jimmy Durante, later to become one of the luminaries of American show business, then a young musical entertainer beginning a career, heard them and declared, "It wasn't only innovative, it was a revolution!"

It was as a result of the performance at Reisenweber's that the Original Dixieland Jazz Band came to the attention of the Victor Talking Machine Company, and, in 1917, recorded "Livery Stable Blues" and "Dixie Jazz Band One-step." This record sold millions of copies and the Original Dixieland Jazz Band became major show business stars. Ralph Berton, a Chicagoan of French ancestry, who later became a musician and writer, describes in his insightful book *Remembering Bix* his reaction upon first hearing the record.

"I was six, living in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and I can still recall my sensations as I heard for the first time the sardonic, driving horn of Nick LaRocca, the impudent smears and growls of Daddy Edwards, the barnyard crowings and whinnyings of Larry Shields, the slaphappy poundings of Ragas and Sabaro. I must have played it a hundred times before I remembered to breathe."

Yet what he was hearing was but a burlesque of the authentic style and a parody of the Afro-American sensibility in much the same way that the contemporary group Sha Na Na parodies the rhythm and blues styles of the 1950s.

Later Berton himself would say of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band,

"The Original Dixieland Jazz Band had swept us all off our feet on first hearing, because we'd never heard any Jazz before. But hard, no-nonsense swinging wasn't the essence of their message; that message was 'let's all get loaded and see how nutty we can act'; the swinging was incidental, a kind of musical nose thumbing at the authority of non-swinging respectability."

By contrast, he describes the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, called by white musicians the Friars Inn Gang, in the following way,

"The Friars Inn Gang swung fifty times as much as the Original Dixieland Jazz Band and, as might be expected, earned one-fiftieth as much money."

Ralph Berton had a bird's eye view of the evolution of the white "Chicago School" of jazz, because his brother Victor Berton, percussionist par excellence, was right in the thick of it. He was also a kind of tag along, worshipful admirer of Bix Beiderbecke, perhaps the most influential musician to emerge from the ranks of white jazz of that era.

King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band.

Describing Bix Beiderbecke's first encounter with the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, Berton writes,

"They played not in the zany tongue-in-cheek spirit of the white bands Bix had come in contact with until now, but seriously — mean and low down, petty or funky, driving or lyrical, but always for real. As we said in those days — and there was no higher praise — they played like niggers."

In describing what they were trying to accomplish as a band, trumpeter Paul Mares, the first musical idol of Beiderbecke, had this to say,

"We did our best to copy the colored music we'd heard at home. We did the best we could, but naturally we couldn't play real colored style."

But if young white musicians were moved by the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, at best a pallid imitation of the originators, what happened when they heard the real thing?

In the Jazz Anthology, *Hear Me Talking to Ya*, Daniel Louis Armstrong, the first great soloist in Afro-American instrumental music, recounts how he migrated to Chicago and what he found when he got there:

"In 1922, when King Joe Oliver sent for me to leave New Orleans and join him at the Lincoln Gardens to play second trumpet, I jumped for joy."

Of course, young Armstrong immediately left for Chicago and tells us,

"I arrived in Chicago about eleven o'clock the night of July 8th, 1922. I'll never forget it, at the Illinois Central Station at 12th and Michigan; I had no one to meet me. I took a cab right to the Gardens. When I was getting out of the cab, I could hear the King's band jumping. I said to myself, 'I wonder if I'm good enough to play in that band.' I hesitated about going inside, but I finally did. Chicago was really jumping around that time. The Dreamland was in full bloom . . . the Plantation was another hot spot . . . the Sunset . . . a lot of after-hour spots was real groovy, too. There was the Apex, where Jimmy Moore and that great piano man, Earl Hines, started all this fine stuff. . . . "

The band Louis Armstrong joined at the Lincoln Gardens was called the Creole Jazz Band, and all of the young white musicians in Chicago, several of whom would later become world famous, came as though they were joining a pilgrimage to Mecca. In fact, Eddie Condon, guitarist and well-known member of the "Chicago School," describes the experience in just such terms. He said the white musicians spoke of their music "as if it were a new religion from Jerusalem." Hoagy Carmichael describes what happened when he, Bix Beiderbecke, and others first heard Louis Armstrong.

"I dropped my cigarette and gulped my drink. Bix was on his feet, his eyes popping. Bob Gillette slid off his chair and under the table. He was excitable that way. I moaned, 'why isn't everybody in the world here to hear this.'"

Eddie Condon gives this account of the first time he heard King Oliver's band,

"Oliver lifted his horn and the first blast of 'Canal St. Blues' hit me. It was hypnosis at first hearing. Everyone was playing what he wanted to play and it was all mixed together as if someone had planned it with a set of micrometer calipers; notes I had never heard were peeling off the edges and dropping through the middle; there was a tone from the trumpets like warm rain on a cold day. Freeman and McPartland and I were immobilized; the music poured unto us like daylight running into a dark hole."

Joe Glaser, who would become an exploiter of the financial rewards generated from the marketing of Afro-American music, was a club owner in Chicago in this period, and recalls,

"All the young musicians in town would come to hear Louis — Benny Goodman, Muggsy Spanier . . . I used to let them in free. Hell, they were kids and never had any money."

Louis Armstrong, of course, was destined to go on to a singular greatness as the man who extended the range of the trumpet, and opened up new artistic horizons for generations of musicians. In 1924, he did a stint as soloist in the trumpet section of the great Fletcher Henderson band, in New York, the pioneer band in the New York Swing tradition. But it was on November 12, 1925, when he walked into the Okeh records studio in Chicago and made the first of a series of records with the Hot Five, that his influence on the New Orleans style became definitive. Joining Armstrong on these recordings was Lil Hardin (piano), Johnny Dodds (clarinetist and Alto sax), Kid Ory (trombone) — who was replaced by John Thomas on the last two sides — and John St. Cyr (banjo). It was on these recordings that Armstrong emerged as a strong soloist. It is interesting to note that the rhythm section was minus a bass viol or tuba — and drums. In later years, these two instruments became essential elements in Afro-American music.

While it is incontestable that Armstrong's influence was peerless, there were nevertheless many other Afro-American musicians in Chicago who were quite influential on the whites who were interested in black music. Among some of the more gifted instrumentalists were: Sidney Bechet, Clarence Williams, Jimmy Moore, Baby Dodds, Tony Jackson, Earl Hines, "Jelly Roll" Morton, Freddie Keppard, et al. In addition, there were many wonderful singers, dancers, comedians, and variety performers working in an Afro-American tradition. "Mezz" Mezzrow describes his first visit to the Deluxe Cafe, a black cabaret on the South Side of Chicago, around 1920.

"What hit me about Twinkle, Alberta (Hunter) and another fine singer in the place named Florence Mills, was their grace and dignified, relaxed attitude. Florence, petite and demure, just stood at ease and sang like a hummingbird."

Years later, he would offer this comparative assessment of white singers,

"A lot of white vocalists, even some with big name bands today, are either as stiff as a stuffed owl or else they go through more wringing and twisting than a snake dancer."

Mezzrow offered this description of the artistic ambiance of the Deluxe Cafe,

"You could see most of the celebrities of the day, colored and white, hanging around the Deluxe. Bill Robinson, the burlesque comedian, Harry Steppe, Comedian Benny Davis, Joe Frisco, Al Jolson, Sophie Tucker, Blossom Seely, a lot of Ziegfeld Follies actors, famous colored teams like Moss and Fry, and Williams and

Bix Beiderbecke.

Benny Goodman.

Mezz Mezzrow.

Walker, Eva Tanguay, Eddie Cantor, who was then Bert Williams' protege — all kinds of show people head for this place whenever they were in town."

This report of white performers hanging out in black showplaces, studying the art of black performers, is a consistent theme in the history of American show business. On this occasion it was the Deluxe Cafe in Chicago, but it could well have been the Cotton Club, or the Savoy Ballroom, or Minton's Playhouse in Harlem, or the Onyx Club and the Three Deuces on 52nd Street in mid-Manhattan.

When one takes a close look at some of the names of white performers who attended black cabarets and stage shows, one will notice the names of the biggest stars in the Euro-American show business tradition. This fact served to verify the far reaching influence Afro-American artists have had on the entire range of American show business. Some of the young white musicians who came to sit at the feet of black instrumentalists in places like the Lincoln Gardens and Dreamland, could well have pursued careers in symphonic music. During the same period that Jazz was establishing itself as a dynamic cultural force in the Windy City, one of the finest — many would say *the* finest — symphonic orchestras and opera companies also resided in Chicago. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra was founded by German Americans at the turn of the century and specialized in classical German music, i.e., the work of Bach, Schubert, Mozart, Beethoven, Franz Lizst, Brahms, Hayden, collectively some of the finest products of the European classical tradition.

The Chicago Orchestra was so German that for a generation even the rehearsals were conducted in that language. Hence, it was a major repository of the European sensibility, a virtual bastion of Western musical orthodoxy. Among those musicians who possessed the artistic potential for a career in symphonic music were Benny Goodman, Bix Beiderbecke, and especially Victor Berton. Beiderbecke, for instance, grew up in a German community in the remote hamlet of Davenport, Iowa, and German music was celebrated in his household and extended family. His grandfather was a professional organist — no doubt familiar with such masterworks as Bach's B Minor Mass and the Passion of Saint Matthew — and his mother was a piano teacher who had herself won performance awards as early as the age of ten. His family claims that Bix at the age of 3, and completely by ear, could play the entire theme of Lizst's "Hungarian Rhapsody #2," an extremely difficult piece of solo piano music.

The musical abilities of Benjamin Goodman as regards the performance of European Concert Music, are aptly demonstrated on his recordings with the Chicago Beethoven Quintet. Persons interested in this phase of Goodman's recording career can simply turn to the records. But the musician with the greatest opportunity to pursue a symphonic career as a mature artist was Victor Berton. As an all around performer, Berton was the principal percussionist in the great U.S. Marine Band under John Philip Sousa; was personally selected by Dr. Josef Zettleman, principal percussionist with the Chicago Symphony, to succeed him; and was later selected as a sideman by Louis Armstrong. In 1926, Berton released a series of recordings titled "Hot Tympani," in which he gave solo performances in the Jazz idiom. His brother Ralph recalls,

" . . . when Vic's first tympani recordings appeared, about 1926, drummers and Jazz listeners in every part of the globe were roweling their brains, trying to figure out what was going on. Many wrote puzzled letters to Music magazines, to the Pathe Recording Company, and to Vic himself."

Almost half a century later, Ralph Berton would recall,

"Despite much earnest effort, no other drummer, as far as I know, ever managed to attain the required skill; hot tympani was a one-man art, and died with Vic Berton."

Victor Berton was considered as one of the all time great percussionists by Dr. Zettleman and Louis Armstrong. The point of these brief profiles of the three artists discussed above is to demonstrate the tremendous attraction of the Afro-American idiom to musicians of all calibers. Here were three men who turned their backs on musical

careers offering both relative economic security and artistic acclaim. Because once having occupied a chair in a major symphony orchestra, the least one could expect was a professorship in a university. Given the financial insecurity and artistic stigma associated with a career in Afro-American music, the obvious question about such choices is why?

"Mezz" Mezzrow supplies us with some insight into the attraction that jazz held for the white instrumentalists *vis-a-vis* symphonic music,

"Never mind about the composer's ideas when he put them down. We were all music makers too, instrumentalists as well as creators. To us the two things were one, a guy composed as he played, the creating and the performing took place at the same time — and we kept thinking what a drag it must be for any musician with spirit to sit in on a symphonic assembly line. Could a musician really stand up and tell his story, let his guts come romping out, when he had to keep one eye glued on a dancing puppet and the other on his music."

Note the theme of personal and artistic freedom central to the above analysis, and also in the following remarkable testament by Mezzrow:

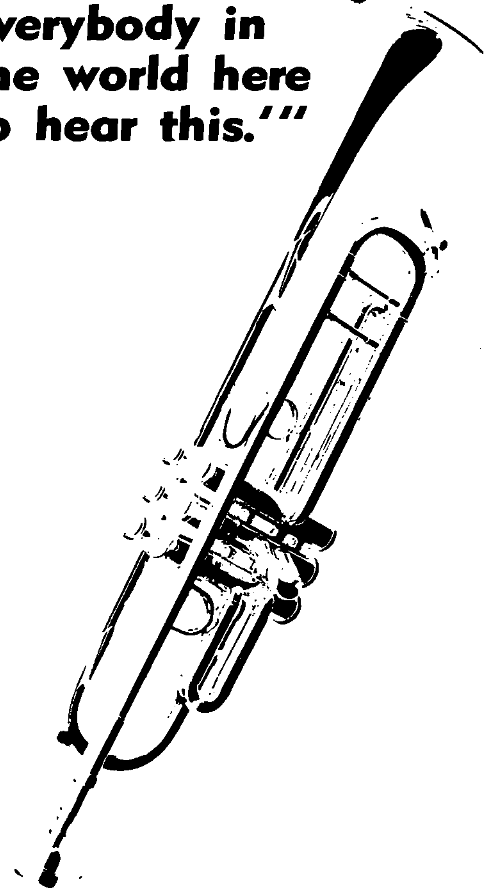
"A creative musician is an anarchist with a horn, and you can't put any shackles on him. Written music is like handcuffs; and so is the pendulum of white tie and tails on the conductor's stand. Symphony means slavery in any jazzman's dictionary. Jazz and freedom are synonymous."

As we have seen all of the major white musicians of the "Chicago School" of jazz freely admit their artistic debt to the black creators of the genre. However, the realities of race and commerce have conspired to minimize, and in some cases even obliterate, the role played by many black musicians in the development of this music. For instance, several musicians from this period would eventually become the subject of major motion pictures; all were white: Benny Goodman, Gene Krupa, and Bix Beiderbecke. In addition, major feature films like "The Birth of the Blues," only featured cameo appearances by black artists! The story centered around the trials and tribulations of a white bandleader, played by the exceedingly bland Bing Crosby, himself the antithesis of the shouting blues spirit! Ironically, it was the participation of these white artists that often introduced the masses of whites to Afro-American music and thus prepared millions to receive the real thing.

Many of the same factors that made the Chicago experience possible were present in New York: a cosmopolitan cultural milieu, an active night life, a sizable black community attracted by the perception of widening economic opportunity and greater personal freedom than existed in their native South. The black musical community in New York was composed of musicians from a wider geographical and musical background. By the turn of the century, New York was already the center of theatrical and concert performance. The musicians who migrated to New York held ambitions that reflected the broad range of opportunity to be found there. Conservatory or otherwise, formally trained black musicians were much more in evidence in New York than Chicago, and played an important role in the evolution of the New York style. Among the most important of the Conservatory-trained musicians were: Will Marion Cook, J. Rosamond Johnson, Will Vodery and William Grant Still. These musicians worked in a variety of forms, including musical theater, popular songs, vaudeville, European concert music, and as instrumentalists and arrangers for the numerous instrumental ensembles that proliferated in New York.

Will Marion Cook, the most prolific of the theatrical writers, was chief composer for a series of musical comedies that found their way to Broadway as vehicles for the gifted song, dance and comedy team of Bert Williams and George Walker. Between 1898, when "Clorindy: The Origin of the Cakewalk" premiered with a libretto by the then most original black American bard, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and 1907 Cook scored seven shows. His fourth show, "In Dahomey," set a precedent by opening on Broadway at Times Square. These shows were original productions featuring authentic Afro-American song and dance, with complete creative control in the hands of black artists. Iron-

"I dropped my cigarette and gulped my drink. Bix was on his feet, his eyes popping. Bob Gillette slid off his chair and under the table. . . . I moaned, 'why isn't everybody in the world here to hear this.'"



"Perhaps the most clearly African cultural retention among Afro-Americans is the popular dance." At the Shalimar, 1986.

ically, Afro-Americans were better positioned in the theater at the turn of the century than they are today, when most musical productions featuring black performers are completely under the creative control of whites.

Another important theater collaboration was that of Bob Cole, J. Rosamond Johnson, and his brother, James Weldon Johnson. An extremely versatile performer who wrote lyrics, composed music, and performed as singer, dancer, and actor, Bob Cole created the first all-black musical comedy of standard length. Premiering in 1898 under the title "A Trip to Coontown," this was the first show, writes Eileen Southern,

"to be written, organized, produced and managed by Negroes. The musical broke away from the minstrel tradition, previously favored by all Negro shows, in having a genuine plot and some character development as well as songs, dances and pretty girls."

William Grant Still participated widely in the musical activities of the period, from working with the publishing company of W.C. Handy to writing arrangements for a variety of ensembles. He also went on to write theme music for commercial radio and work as an instrumentalist in orchestras and combos. Still eventually found his niche composing operas and works for symphony orchestras and small ensembles. In the 1920s, along with Will Vodery and Will Marion Cook, he wrote arrangements for Paul Whiteman (mislabeled the "King of Jazz" by the major media), whose orchestra featured a brand of pretentiously contrived music called "symphonic jazz."

The theatrical productions written and produced by these Afro-American artists represented an original development in U.S. theater. Theirs was a movement to liberate the Afro-American image from the straitjacket of minstrel parody imposed on it by the white performers in black face. The rave reviews generated by these black musical comedies attracted the attention of the producers of white shows, the most powerful of whom, Florenz Ziegfeld, bought the rights to several acts from these shows for exhibition in his "Follies." However, the Afro-American shows exerted a far greater influence on Western society through the dance crazes they inspired. After performances in Europe by Williams and Walker, the Cakewalk was taken up with a passion by all classes of Europeans, from the aristocracy to the proletariat.

Perhaps the most clearly African cultural retention among Afro-Americans is the popular dance. The emphasis on intricate footwork, pelvic contractions, improvisation, dramatic movement in the head and upper body and acrobatic athleticism is characteristic of traditional African and neo-African dance; i.e., Afro-Cuban, Afro-Brazilian, Haitian, and Afro-American. It is in the dance that the Afro-American sensibility is most dramatically expressed. Indeed, it was the accompanying dances more than the instrumental music that elicited a hysterical response from those self-appointed guardians of public morality. To them, the sight of otherwise upstanding white couples shaking with reckless abandon to uptempo polyrhythms symbolized an epidemic of moral degeneracy presaging the decline of Western civilization. Afro-American satirist Ishmael Reed explores this question in his novel, *Mumbo-Jumbo*, Afro-American music being symbolized as "Jes grew" and the uptight white establishment as the "Wallflower Order."

The Puritans might have wished to unleash the police powers of the state to suppress the offending dance styles, but their popularity with the capitalist elite effectively prevented any such development. In his lively and poetic *This Was Harlem*, Jervis Anderson observes,

"A number of the vernacular steps that the black masses favored were also popular in clubs of downtown Manhattan, where the pre-war "modern" dances enjoyed their strongest vogue."

(From left) Cholly Atkins and Honi Coles, early 1940s.

And Lloyd Morris, in his *Incredible New York*, writes,

"There, locked in a tight embrace, they moved through the startling figures of the Texas Tommy, the Bunny Hug, the Grizzly Bear, the Turkey Trot, the One Step, or the Tango. Never before had well-bred people seen, much less performed, such flagrantly salacious contortions. Yet, as a popular song declared, 'everybody's doing it.'"

The fascination with black dance styles displayed by the masses of white folks at the turn of the century quickly blossomed into a love affair that has persisted until today. Indeed, white America has stood in the wings and watched in amazement as black Americans took center stage and created a fascinating array of dance styles. Over the course of this century, Afro-Americans taught the nation to do the Eagle Rock, the Turkey Trot, the Lindy Hop, and the Slop, the Charleston, the Black Bottom, the Jitterbug, and the Bunny Hug, the Madison, the Twist, the Bump, the Pop, and the Break. In spite of impassioned warning from the Wallflower Order, generations of whites have taken to the dance floor under the spell of black music. Perhaps the attraction of Afro-American music to white dancers lay in the fact that, left to their own devices, white American musicians consistently invent music that is hostile to the dynamics of elegant movement. It is as if white folks' attempts at graceful improvisation on the dance floor are sabotaged by their music. For a graphic illustration of this point one need only turn on the television, watch "Soul Train," and then compare the dancers to those on "Bandstand."

Albert Murray offers this insight into the achievement of the Afro-American dancer,

"The blues idiom dancer, like the solo instrumentalist, turns disjunctures into continuities. He is not disconcerted by intrusions, lapses, shifts in rhythm, intensification of tempo, for instance; but is inspired by them to higher and richer levels of improvisations."

On the significance of this achievement Murray offers this analysis,

"But then, impromptu heroism such as is required only of the most agile of storybook protagonists, is precisely what the blues tradition has evolved to condition negroes to regard as normal procedure! Nor is any other attitude towards experience more appropriate to the ever-shifting circumstances of all Americans or more consistent with the predicament of man in the contemporary world at large."

Pearl Primus, 1945.

Of course, black Americans danced to the tunes of many different pipers in every corner of the country. But one musical organization was largely responsible for making Afro-American music and dance a national obsession among the masses of white Americans: The Tempo Club Orchestra, directed by James Reese Europe. Founded in 1914, the group represented a remnant — albeit a choice one — of a much larger organization known as the Clef Club. Jervis Anderson describes how the latter organization came into existence.

"In 1910, when Europe founded the Club, he wanted merely to provide a central hiring place for the black musicians of the city. They were then badly disorganized and were poorly paid by the ballrooms, hotels, restaurants, clubs, and private families who hired them from time to time."

This set the stage for the development of an orchestra.

"From among those who registered, Europe picked the men who made up the Clef Club Orchestra, a pioneering big band and the most remarkable group of its kind that New York had ever seen."

While the Clef Club Orchestra exhibited features that suggested something less than complete emancipation from European conventional wisdom, there was on the other hand some real innovation. The influence of European convention is revealed in the size and name of the orchestra. At its peak, it employed 150 musicians and was referred to as a syncopated symphony orchestra. But the instrumentation and the importance of rhythmic invention in relation to melodic and harmonic considerations represented a unique development in the orchestral language of Western music. The orchestra was composed of fifty mandolins, thirty harp guitars, ten banjos, twenty violins, ten cellos, five flutes, a saxophone, five clarinets, three tympani complemented by snare drums, five bass violins, ten pianos, and two organs. The preponderance of rhythm instruments demonstrates the percussive nature of the music and acknowledges the centrality of rhythm in all Neo-African art.

Clearly, this musical aggregation reflects an evolving idea of the orchestra. For while it is no longer European, it is not yet the prototype of the classic Afro-American orchestra that would emerge in the next fifteen years. Clearly the presence of thirty-five viols represented by cellos, violins, and the double bass represents a concession to European convention. The decision to feature mandolins and banjos in such prominence is obviously a celebration of the Afro-American musical heritage. But there are no brass instruments and the saxophone appears to be little more than an ornament. Yet in less than twenty years, these instruments would become the dominant voices in Afro-American music. In 1913, the Clef Club Orchestra gave the first concert of Afro-American music at Carnegie Hall. One white reviewer described the event in the following terms,

"It was an astonishing sight . . . that filled the entire stage with banjos . . . eloquent in syncopation . . . as one looked through the audience, one saw heads swaying and feet tapping in time to the rhythm, and when the march neared the end and the whole band burst out singing as well as playing, the novelty of this climax . . . brought a very storm of tumultuous applause."

James Reese Europe (center) with members of the Clef Club Symphony Orchestra.

However, it was as the leader of the much smaller band, the Tempo Club, that James Reese Europe was to have his greatest influence on Western culture. It was as the leader of this group that Europe became the Musical Director and sometimes choreographer for the dance team of Vernon and Irene Castle. The Castles were a white couple who introduced Afro-American dance styles to white America. Jervis Anderson describes Europe's relationship with the Castles thus,

"The orchestra of James Reese Europe, the best known of the black bands in New York, was almost the only one that the Castles danced to — at Harlem's Manhattan Casino, in the clubs and cabarets downtown, at society balls, or on extended tours of the United States."

The powerful influence of the Castles on public morals and manners is summed up by Lloyd Morris,

"The Castles were not only national idols, but arbiters of etiquette. You went to study them at their small, smart supper room, Sans Souci, or at Castles in the Air, a cabaret where they danced once every evening . . . The cult of joy was a serious matter, and it involved the elderly and middle aged as well as the young."

Noble Sissle, who would later team up with Eubie Blake and write the smash Broadway musical "Shufflin' Along" in 1922, shared these memories on the importance of the Clef Club and Tempo Club Orchestras in establishing Afro-American dance as the national tradition.

"After the turn of the century, the rage was the Viennese waltz — lots of gypsy bands playing violins, mandolins, cellos and things. The gypsy bands used to serenade people eating, and after that, they played dances like the Blue Danube. There was no common American dance music. About 1910, James Europe formed the Clef Club. They played a lively kind of music — none of this one, two, three stuff, with no in-between steps. Well, the white people heard about them and came to listen, and before you could turn around, they were hiring the Clef Club to come and play. The Clef Club used to go on after the

gypsy band finished playing, and whatever was the last waltz the gypsy band played, the Clef Club would start off by playing it in ragtime. All of a sudden people commenced getting up and trying to dance it. And this was the beginning of the Negro taking over New York music and establishing our rhythms."

Noble Sissle also provided us with a rather complete picture of the kind of itinerary the Tempo Club Orchestra followed,

"Later, when Europe formed the Tempo Club, we played in parlors, drawing rooms, yachts, private railroad cars, exclusive millionaires' clubs, swanky hotels, and fashionable resorts."

Speaking of the general situation of the black musicians he knew, Sissle tells us,

"I think we boys who came to New York and were in the music profession at that time lived through the happiest and most interesting time in the development of American music . . . (This halcyon era was due to the fact that) . . . we were the only musicians who could play jazz music to satisfy society people. It was our music, and the wealthy people would not take a substitute when they could buy the original."

This is all fascinating, yet one wonders what was the real relationship of these artists to their audience. Since it is well known that the American plutocracy is basically an uncultured, anti-intellectual bunch, one wonders whether these people really understood that a new and important art form was being created; or whether they simply viewed the whole thing as background music for drunken escapades.

One thing, however, is indisputable; by the second decade of the twentieth century, the Afro-American musician had set a precedent in Western art. The uniqueness of this contribution is demonstrated not only in its power over the ordinary listener, but in the fascination and curiosity it stimulated in the aspiring player and the leaders of the modernist movement in European concert music. Among their numbers, one could point to Igor Stravinsky, Darius Milhaud, Maurice Ravel, and Claude Debussy. The learned and often perceptive French musician and critic Andre Hodeir, writing in a book titled *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence,* offers these observations,

"Stravinsky and Milhaud's statements are not confined to emphasizing the esthetic interest of jazz (or what they took for jazz), they also betray a desire to adapt and stylize it, and some of their works continue this. Stravinsky's ragtime in 'L'histoire du Soldat, Ragtime pour onze instruments, and piano Rag Music' show the way; Milhaud follows with 'La Creation du Monde'; and Ravel brings up the rear with the fox trot of 'L'enfant et les Sortileges' and his two piano concertos."

Hodeir traces the role of Afro-American musical ideas in the melodic construction of these compositions,

"There are appreciable melodic borrowings from the language of blues and spirituals in the compositions we are considering. Ravel's 'Concerto in G' for example, had melodic lines in which the blue note plays a role."

He finds another powerful example in the work of Ravel,

"Even more clearly, the melodic theme that develops in the 'Concerto pour la Main Gauche' beginning at number 28 borrows its elements from Negro blues."

Of course, these experimental attempts to synthesize modern European music and the emergent Afro-American instrumental music were short lived. This is because the purpose and sensibility of the two forms is irreconcilable. In spite of the truism that the European composer was in search of an expanded creative freedom in the modernist idiom, the fact remains that they were composers and therefore spelled anathema to the commitment to improvisation within the Afro-American tradition. Perhaps the real importance of these experiments in musical synthesis, whether conducted by the traditionalist Dvorák, or the modernists Ravel and Stravinsky, lay in their corroboration of the universal appeal of Afro-American music.

It should be understood that no one was more aware of the unique character and potential of Afro-American music than the formally-trained musicians who gathered in New York City

Earl 'Fatha' Hines.

Fletcher Henderson.

Jimmie Lunceford.

Duke Ellington.

Count Basie.

in the dawning years of this century. To be sure, some of them were misguided in their concerns, in that they thought Afro-American music would take the same path of development as European concert music. Perhaps it is too much to expect that men like Will Marion Cook, J. Rosamond Johnson, James Weldon Johnson, and William Grant Still would foresee that the true path to an Afro-American art music lay in the vision of the improvisors and not the composers. For they were too steeped in the conventions of European classical music to entertain such a notion. Even Scott Joplin believed that the most important developments in Afro-American music would come from the pen of composers. Hence, he spent the final years of his life obsessed with winning recognition for his opera, "Treemonisha," now generally conceded to be a seminal piece in original American composition.

In retrospect, it appears that it was the experiments of the Clef Club and Tempo Club Orchestras that have had the greatest impact of all early New York bands on contemporary Afro-American orchestral styles. For, as the moving force in these musical ensembles, James Reese Europe recognized the tendency toward improvisation by black musicians and sought to accommodate it. Europe was a formally-trained musician, albeit outside of the confines of the academy, with broad experience that included work as a theater musician on Broadway and leader of the military band of the 369th regiment of the U.S. Army. This band projected a distinctly Afro-American style and was widely considered to be the most dynamic military ensemble ever assembled. Like the other composer-musicians of the New York group, Europe was a cultural nationalist. When asked about the "syncopated symphony's" performance at Carnegie Hall, he remarked,

"We have developed a kind of symphony music that, no matter what else you think, is different and distinctive, and that lends itself to the playing of the peculiar compositions of our race."

From this auspicious beginning, Afro-American musicians have gone on to fulfill their destiny as the premier artists of American civilization. Beginning in the 1920s, the arranged orchestral music of New York, combined with the improvisational tradition of New Orleans and Chicago, are merged in the swinging big bands of the Southwest and Northeast. These two voices, the hard swinging blues stomp of Oklahoma/Kansas City, and the lightly swinging elegant blues extensions of New York were epitomized in its early development by the Benny Moten and Fletcher Henderson bands. This dual tradition would be refined and enriched through the '30s and '40s by a panoply of wonderful voices including Andy Kirk, Jimmie Lunceford, Claude Hopkins, Erskine Hawkins, Earl Hines, and Chick Webb. However, these two traditions would reach long-term perfection in the sounds of the Count Basie and Duke Ellington Orchestras. The power and appeal of the two orchestras is verified by the fact that they retained enthusiastic audiences for a half century, indeed until the death of their founders. Today, Ellington is recognized the world over as the quintessential American genius in the arts.

This musical innovation of Afro-Americans also inspired legions of devotees among white artists and laymen. Upon hearing this music, bands of white imitators formed from one end of the country to the other. Among the most famous were: Glenn Miller, The Dorsey Brothers, Charlie Barnet, and Benny Goodman. Though many years had lapsed since the great commercial success of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, America remained the same racist, economically predatory society she had always been. Hence the white boys made the most money from the latest contribution of black folks. And the white media establishment was quick to dub Benny Goodman "The King of Swing." Goodman, as we have shown earlier, was frequenting black cabarets in Chicago from the beginning of the jazz phenomenon. His success was due to several factors: he was white, and he understood the music better than most white bandleaders; he stayed close to the Afro-American source by hiring outstanding black instrumentalists; and he was able to get commercial sponsorship on network radio

from the National Biscuit Company.

Nonetheless, the black bands remained the artistic vanguard and put together swinging ensembles that featured great soloists. Among the outstanding soloists featured in the big band era are: Ben Webster, Coleman Hawkins, Harry "Sweets" Edison, Cootie Williams, Cat Anderson, Johnny Hodges, Dickie Wells, John Birks Gillespie, Benny Carter, Charles Parker, J.J. Johnson, Lester Young, Ray Nance, Lionel Hampton, Sidney Bechet, Barney Bigard, Slide Hampton, Frank Foster, Miles Davis, etc. With all of these great improvisors straining at the leash, it was clear that the day would come when they would seek a greater freedom of expression than that allowed by the constraints of the large orchestra. By the 1930s, this music had become the universally preferred music of dancers the world over. Of course, the preferred style of dance was Afro-American. The most celebrated dance emporium in the world by the early forties was the Savoy Ballroom, dubbed the "home of happy feet." Here one was as likely to encounter movie stars, heiresses, or the prince of Wales as Harlem hip cats and proletarian blacks. All were there for one purpose, to lose themselves in the liberating ritual of dance.

In a protest against the restrictions of what had now become the conventions of dance band performances, and to distinguish themselves from the commercial imitations of white bands, a group of young artistic iconoclasts were meeting in obscure spots in the dark of night, conspiring to come up with a musical style that would confound all but the most gifted instrumentalists. Ralph Ellison, then a young man from Oklahoma with musical ambitions, describes the scene at Minton's Playhouse — the most important incubator of the impending bop revolution — in an essay titled "The Golden Age: Time Past."

"Usually music gives resonance to memory (and Minton's was a hotbed of jazz), but not the music then in the making here. It was itself a texture of fragments, repetitive, nervous, not fully formed; its melodic lines underground, secret and taunting; its riffs jeering 'salt peanuts! salt peanuts!' Its timbres flat or shrill with a minimum

Duke Ellington Orchestra, 1934.

Count Basie Orchestra, 1940.

Charlie Parker, 1949.

of thrilling vibrato. Its rhythms were out of stride and seemingly arbitrary, its drummers frozen-faced introverts, dedicated to chaos. And in it, the steady flow of memory, desire, and defined experience summed up by the traditional jazz beat and blues mood seemed swept like a great river from its old, deep bed.

"Or some will tell that it was here that Dizzy Gillespie found his own trumpet voice; that here Kenny Clarke worked out the patterns of his drumming style; where Charlie Christian played out the last creative and truly satisfying moments of his brief life, his New York home; where Charlie Parker built the monument of his art; where Thelonious Monk formulated his contribution to the hide and seek melodic methods of modern jazz," writes Ellison as he enumerates the contributions of some of the most important co-conspirators of the bop revolution. These stalwart pioneers, supported by other artistic adventurers such as bassist Oscar Pettiford, pianist Bud Powell, and drummer Max Roach, opened up new musical horizons which seemed to offer truly limitless possibilities. The result was the creation of a complex instrumental music which has achieved the highest levels of virtuosity, and set unequalled standards of improvised performance.

Henry Pleasants, one of the most learned students of Western music, describes this achievement in his thoughtful and provocative book *Serious Music and All That Jazz,*

"Trumpets were played higher than they had ever been played, or ever should have been played. Saxophones were made to yield a thousand or so notes a measure, along with uncouth grunts and squeals at the extremes of the range. Double-bass players developed a dexterity beyond the wildest imagining of any symphony orchestra bassist, and drummers opened up an entirely new world of rhythmic and percussive variety. Pianists adopted a driving velocity modeled on the symptoms of Bud Powell's infatuation with Parker, although tending to play as if their left hands had just been caught in a drummer's rimshot. Vibraharp and guitar virtuosity added to the fun."

Dizzy Gillespie.

As a man who had acquired a broad education in European classical music, first as a student in several of the leading conservatories, and then as the *New York Times* music critic, Pleasants viewed American musical developments from a unique perspective and arrived at some highly original conclusions. For him, there is no question that the complex improvisational instrumental music of Afro-Americans is the great American contribution to Western art.

"Here, for the first time, was an art for which the older European intellectual could claim no authorship, with which he had no sense of identity, and over which he could exercise no control. He could talk about it, but without the assurance of knowing what he was talking about. He could disparage it as a popular aberration, and this was his habitual tactic, but his intelligence — and the example of his intelligent juniors — told him that there was more to its popularity than mere childish delight in a childish fad. His intelligence told him that his musical tradition was in trouble."

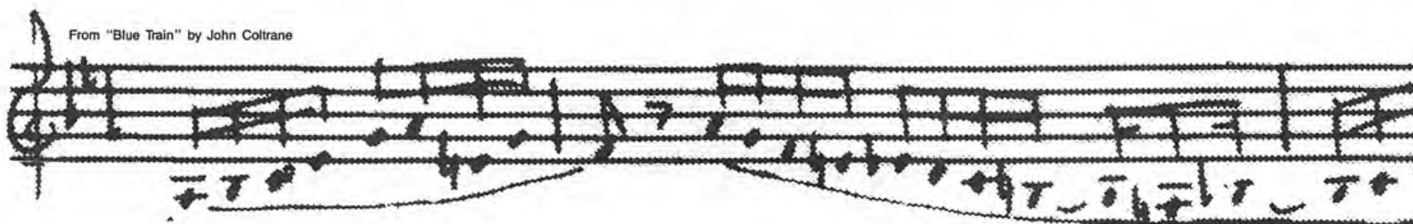
In discussing the uniqueness of jazz as a quintessentially American art, Pleasants argues,

"None of this sense of conflict, of incompatibility, with European conventions has been conspicuous in America's other cultural exports. What America produced in the theater, in literature and in the graphic arts may have disclosed distinctively American characteristics; but there was no radical departure from European precedent and European criteria. But jazz made its own rules and went its own way."

This observation raises some important questions; how does jazz, the highest creative product of Afro-American culture, compare with other of America's contributions to twentieth-century art? One would be hard put to find a genre of American theater whose basic structure and esthetic philosophy was not developed or suggested in the drama of Shakespeare, Moliere, Chekhov, Ibsen, O'Casey, and Genet. There is little in modernist American fiction that was not anticipated in the work of James Joyce, Flaubert, and the American writer Henry James, working from a self-imposed European exile. James retreated to England to write after having concluded that the American cultural landscape was too barren to sustain a vital literary tradition. And it would require an unthinking fanatic to argue that the paintings of Jackson Pollock or William de Kooning, two pioneers of the American Abstract Expressionist school, represent an original American contribution to world culture comparable to the art of Duke Ellington or Charles Parker.

In terms of the place of Afro-American classical music in the tradition of Western art music, Henry Pleasants offers a provocative but obviously accurate assessment. He argues that

Kenny Clarke.



Thelonious Monk.

"The history of Western music conventionally identifies a succession of more or less clearly circumscribed epochs, e.g., Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo, Classic, Romantic, and Modern; the last of these dating from about 1910 and continuing to the present."

But what the traditional historian has often accepted as conventional wisdom holds a special significance for Pleasants,

"The Renaissance, for instance, was dominated by the Netherlands, the Baroque by Italy, the Classic by Austria-Bohemia, and the Romantic by Germany. And it is this phenomenon, historically noted and fully documented but critically slighted, that may provide, in my opinion, a clue to a better understanding of what has happened and is still happening in our own century."

In Pleasants' view, what was happening was the end of the European era in music.

"If we look for a corresponding national dominion — and a continuity of the pattern of successive national or cultural dominions — we can find persuasive evidence that we are now in the midst of what future musical historians may well designate the Afro-American epoch."

As has been pointed out above, black American music exhibited unique characteristics even in its early expression as a vocal folk music, and this uniqueness rendered it difficult, if not impossible, to transcribe using conventional methods of notation. This fact is still true, however, as Afro-American artists developed a new instrumental music, they invented a technical idiom to describe it. This was the first time since the Baroque period that a new language challenged the dominance of Italian as the international language of musical terminology.

Max Roach.

Henry Pleasants offers this analysis of the universal importance of Afro-American musical terminology,

"American English is the common language of the jazz musicians everywhere, and the singular terminology of jazz is internationally understood even by those whose command of a more commonplace English vocabulary is limited. Where American jazz musicians use such terms as bop, swing, groove, cool, lead, funk, soul, riff, break, intro, segue, chorus, release, change, comp and so on, other jazz musicians know immediately what they are talking about. A German, French, Italian, Swedish, Swiss, Yugoslav, Hungarian, Polish, or Japanese jazzman, reading a jazz arrangement, or original will not be put off when he finds himself directed to play in a medium basic "groove," or to "play time freely," or to "comp changes."

But, when non Afro-American musicians opted to dedicate themselves to jazz performance, they adopted something more than a new musical language. They also assimilated a foreign sensibility, and this new attitude toward life is expressed in everything from timbre and cadences of speech to motor habits. In other words, they have become partially Afro-American in cultural terms; they are cultural mulattoes in their emotional life. It is a fact of life that indicates the level of personal commitment necessary for great artistic achievement. Conversely, one can also observe this process of emotional assimilation in the persona of non-European artists in the field of Western classical music. For example, one need only observe the European-inspired speech, bearing, and performance style of such artists

By Ademola Olugebefola, 1980

as: Afro-American Jessye Norman (Met Soprano), Chinese Yo Yo Ma (virtuoso cellist), East Indian Zubin Mehta (conductor), Afro-American Andre Watts (virtuoso pianist), and Japanese Seiji Ozawa (conductor), in order to verify the truth of this proposition. Similarly, the influence of Afro-American music is too pervasive for even a partial listing of major international artists whose personal styles have been affected by the blues/jazz idiom.

Clearly, a comprehensive survey of the development of Afro-American music throughout the course of the twentieth century is beyond the scope of this essay. All we can do here is establish the proposition that the musical contribution of black America is an original contribution to the artistic heritage of the world, and that it represents a unique sensibility in Western culture. Furthermore, it is our contention that the sensibilities projected in black music offered a new vision of personal and artistic freedom to Western man. From the evidence at hand it seems clear to us that the white folks, artist and layman alike, who performed, listened to, and danced to Afro-American music discovered an artistic vehicle that provided a means of escape from the prison of repressive social and cultural conventions. In our view, only this fact can explain the passionate, often manic, way in which multitudes of whites throughout the Western world embraced this new art and made it their own. ■

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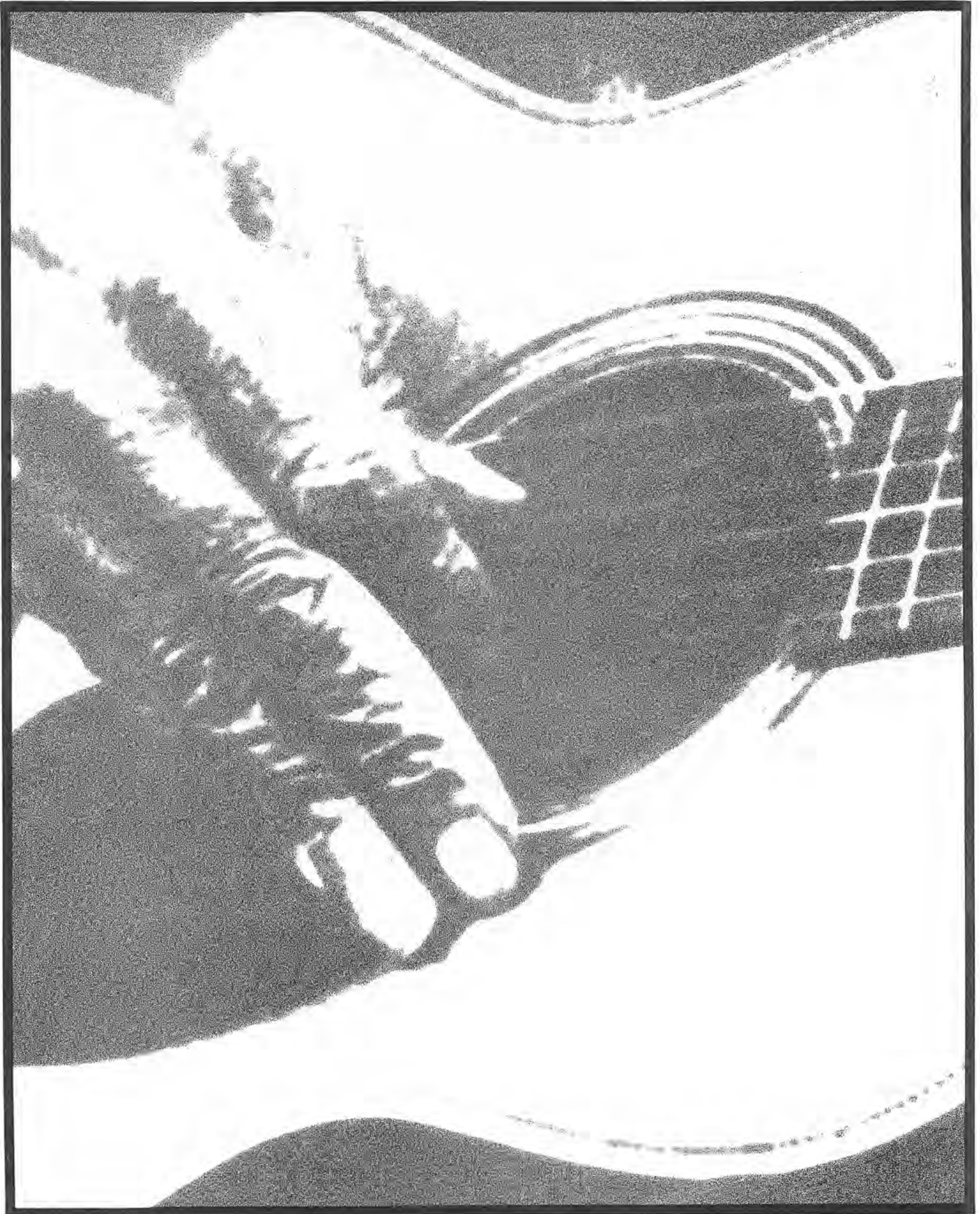


The BLUES according to Peppermint Harris

An Interview by

LORENZO THOMAS

Harrison Nelson, professionally known as Peppermint Harris, was born in 1925 and grew up around Texarkana. A talented poet and guitarist, he began recording for Houston's Gold Star and Sittin' In With labels in 1947 and enjoyed some local success. He moved on to Los Angeles in 1950 where he joined the group of expatriate Ark-La-Tex blues musicians who produced the exciting Aladdin/Modern/Specialty brand of Rhythm & Blues that shaped the early Rock & Roll sound. The musicians might have been from the country, but the sound they developed was the precursor of what critic Charlie Gillette aptly termed "the sound of the city."

A key element of this sound was the blend of

How long must I suffer
For one mistake
I made?
How long must I suffer
For one mistake
I made?
If I've been mean
and evil,
Well, you know darn
well I paid

— Peppermint Harris

blues vocals and guitar with jazz orchestrations provided by saxophonists such as Maxwell Davis, a brilliant innovator who is not as well remembered as he should be. Arnold Shaw, in Honkers and Shouters: The Golden Years of Rhythm & Blues *(1978), places Davis in the same "incandescent" ranks as Red Prysock, Sil Austin, and King Curtis. Harris' early Houston recordings won him a job working with Davis at Aladdin Records when he arrived in California. Though mostly appreciated as a songwriter, Harris made the charts with "Raining In My Heart" in 1950 and produced a number one record with the classic "I Got Loaded" in 1951.*

Resettling in Houston in 1960, Harris went to work as a songwriter/artist for Don Robey's Duke and Peacock labels. Peacock, of course, was the major Black-owned record company of the early 1950s with a roster of stars including Gatemouth Brown, Johnny Ace, Big Mama Thornton, Bobby Bland, and a studio full of outstanding local musicians. Shortly before Robey's death in 1975, the company's catalogue was sold to ABC Records.

In 1977, Peppermint Harris was working a day gig at Houston Records, a disc pressing plant. Tom Usslemann, a former disc jockey and blues enthusiast, went there to inquire about prices, found Harris at work, and began a collaboration with him that resulted in the reissue of the early Sittin' In With recordings on Usslemann's shoestring Lunar #2 label.

Everything that has been done about Black society, Black culture — all of these folks get left out. The reason for that I think is because Black people are not in charge of what is said.

Since then, Peppermint Harris' music has received growing — and long deserved — appreciation both at home and abroad. Canadian musicologist Hank Davis edited several European releases, and Harris has been active with appearances at the annual Juneteenth Blues Festival, club dates, and work with Howard Harris' outstanding People's Workshop Orchestra in Houston.

Just to digress: The People's Workshop deserves an article all its own because it is amazingly representative of a city with a Black community that supports the Fresh Festival as well as five regular blues radio programs, and *the Community Music Center of Houston which is devoted to the works of Dett, Kay, and the great Afro-American classical music tradition (including contemporaries such as Anderson, and Austin's Earll Stewart)!*

My conversations with Peppermint Harris have always been fascinating, partly because of his friendly charm . . . and partly because his experiences cover the transition from country blues to the early days of the high-powered contemporary music industry. He also has first-hand knowledge of the Black urban milieu that produced and supported the music. Pep's interest in motion pictures and other entertainment modes is also significant.

Most of this interview was conducted in August 1978 at Harris' sister's home in Houston's Fifth Ward, just around the corner from the now vacant headquarters of Don Robey's Peacock Records.

The text has been edited and includes material (for purposes of clarification) from other conversations with Peppermint Harris. The tapes and transcriptions are part of the collection of the "Black Music In Houston" Project of the Houston Center for the Humanities. The project is intended to establish a permanent research collection of materials concerning Black musicians that will be archived at the Houston Public Library and, when catalogued, made available to the public.

* * *

Thomas: The big band sound of blues records in the late 1940s and

early '50s is so different from the small group or solo blues sound of earlier years. How did it work?

Harris: We would arrange . . . I wouldn't write for the singer, I'd just write for the band and the singer was more or less on his own, you understand. But as things changed, as the singer became the big person, you'd see people like . . . Billy Eckstine, June Richmond.

Thomas: Billy Eckstine had a really popular band in the late '40s.

Harris: Well see, before he got his band he was singing with Fatha Hines.

Here's what they used to do. For instance, I played the blues guitar and you can notice on some records where I had Maxwell Davis arranging . . . you'll notice the big band. But, see, it's written so the band might play a riff (sings) like that. And the guitar and the singer would play (sings) against that.

Thomas: Like T-Bone Walker.

Harris: Yeah. But this type of thing . . . that's the way they were writing then.

Thomas: Pee Wee Crayton?

Harris: Yeah, and B.B.'s early records.

Thomas: Did Maxwell Davis also arrange those?

Harris: What happened is this: I was on Aladdin Records; so was Amos Milburn, Charles Brown. During that time Maxwell was with Aladdin Records; he was the arranger there. The A & R man there. And Floyd Dixon was there. They had success after success but he left Aladdin and went to Modern — that's the parent company of Crown, RPM, all of this. I left at the same time and went over there but I still had a writing contract with Aladdin Records.

Oh, Max and I were real good friends. As a result people like Etta James, Johnny Watson, Jesse Belvin, Richard Perry . . . we were all out there at Modern. There was a baseball player named Lee Mays; he was on the label, too. So you can see the play. Even at Specialty, Maxwell did all those things when Percy Mayfield was on there. So, you see, if you listen to all those records you can hear that pattern, hear that big round sound of Maxwell Davis'.

Thomas: That's an important era.

Harris: What I would really like to do is get a national booking firm . . . be able to play colleges, maybe with a narrator like Larry Steele did, and build a show say *The Early '20s Up Till Now.*

Thomas: Larry Steele?

Harris: Like Larry Steele's Smart Affairs . . . it was a dance company. Larry Steele and all those beautiful girls. We worked a show in Atlanta with him.

Thomas: Everything that has been done about Black society, Black culture — all of these folks get left out. The reason for that I think is because Black people are not in charge of what *is* said. These are all the people I remember from being a little kid, the people my parents enjoyed.

Harris: Well, you take people like this . . . what they did was this (which I think we're in sore need of now) . . . what they did, they took their raw culture and presented it in a grand manner. It unfolds.

Actually, the show I'm talking about is a historical type of thing because of *this*: It starts out with the Roaring '20s and shows one era to another era right on up to the current time. Then you can see just a whole picture, just like a flower growing. Then you see where it has gone from its roots to there. And in order to enjoy the final result, if Blacks know what the beginning was . . . then, you understand, you can appreciate it more. By knowing the whole story.

Thomas: We do have to turn around the whole thing and put the people that *we* think, or have thought,

T-Bone Walker, Charles Brown, Percy Mayfield, Bobby "Blue" Bland.

were important in a prominent place . . . not people someone else thinks . . .

Harris: Yeah! In other words, there are a lot of people who made very definite contributions . . . a lot of people are lost, forgotten. Just like if you wanted to say things and there's not enough time or something, or you don't have it prepared . . . there's a lot of things you forget. Back when we were talking about B.B. King . . . like a lot of those jazz musicians worked with B.B. in Los Angeles.

Things were like this. When Maxwell was at Aladdin there were one or two guys . . . it was like a clique, you understand. Maxwell called the people that he wanted on his sessions . . . as A & R man. So, as a result, he liked good musicians.

Now, I recorded with Red Callender . . . what's his name . . . a jazz piano player. I can't think of his name . . . Tiny Wells. They were on my very first records. These people seem heavy, but these were Maxwell's friends, you understand. Only thing they would do for this is make sessions, they didn't play gigs. I'm trying to think of that jazz piano player . . . he recorded on Blue Note and he's on my very first record for Aladdin Records. So you can see these jazz people behind a novice and country blues singer! Ha hah! But this is the caliber of musicians that they used.

Thomas: What's the real difference actually between jazz and country blues?

B.B. King.

Harris: I'm not qualified really to answer this, I don't know enough about it. In my opinion there is a very definite difference because the people in jazz are really superb musicians. Well-trained musicians. Sometimes they improvise, but this is already studied. They know what they're improvising . . . unless you're Erroll Garner or somebody like this. Tiny Bradshaw. But usually they're very very fine musicians. But the bridge, to me, seems very narrow. You take Ray Charles, he's a very learned musician, you understand . . . but he can play lowdown dirty blues. But — on another level — just like spirituals, blues . . . I don't see that much difference.

Thomas: Would you say, realizing the fact of how well-trained in music most jazz players are, that their concern with the blues is because of the color situation . . . that they're not able to go into the films, classical music, or Broadway?

Harris: Oh, I don't think that that is their concern at all. I believe they just like to play good music.

Thomas: And the blues is that.

Harris: Yes. Jazz came out of blues. It's just an embellishment and they do different things and use different structures. I mean, they are so far advanced musically until they can take a straight "Saints Go Marching In" but they're playing all kinds of things. I knew this guy Ike Royal, a piano player from Los Angeles. I made a blues tune and he used nothing but three pieces — bass, guitar, he played piano. He used all Rachmaninoff chords.

Thomas: Playing blues?

Harris: That's what I was singing! So, I mean, there's different ideas.

Thomas: Where do your ideas in music come from?

Harris: I don't know. I just know what I like, what I hear. A lot of different sounds, you know. For instance, I like all kinds of music. There's that song "I'll Learn To Love Again" I wrote a couple of years ago. Junior Parker recorded it. I don't have nothing to play it on now, or I'd play it. Ha hah hah! The jukebox down the street . . . Ha hah!

To show you the difference: if you listen to that or you listen to "Sweet Black Angels" or "Red River Blues" . . . it's a different person altogether. This thing goes:

Although my heart has been
kicked around
. . .
and I have found
Your lips are sin;
Now that I'm free
don't pity me,
I'll learn to love again . . .

It's got a nice group on the background.

Thomas: Yes. I remember the record. Do you remember the Masters of Soul?

Harris: Yeah.

Thomas: Fred Kibble of the Masters told me that he started out working for Don Robey. He was just a kid still going to school. His job was to sing songs, I guess they'd tape them . . .

Harris: Yes they did.

Thomas: . . . and send them out to Bobby Bland so he could choose which one he wanted. Fred's job was just to tape songs for Bobby Bland.

Harris: Joe Medwick did the same thing, we all did. When I was writing down there that's what you'd do; just put 'em on tape and send them to the artists. Like Larry Davis did this thing . . . "Angels in Houston." That's what I called it then. And Bobby did "Lost Sight On The World." Junior did "Stranded In St. Louis" and he sang "I'll Learn To Love Again." We used to put them on tape for the singers. Joe Hinton, those guys . . .

Thomas: Joe Hinton had an R & B hit with a Willie Nelson country tune, "Funny How Time Slips Away."

Harris: Was that a Willie Nelson tune?

Thomas: Yeah.

Harris: I didn't know who did that. I heard it a long time ago, and a lot of artists have done it. And there's another song:

■

I've used a lot of phrases about Texas and Tennessee. I guess because the blues to me is like Tennesse . . .

So little time, and so much
so much to do

Joe . . . I was hoping he would do that. He did a lot of things.

You see I've written about a million tunes, I guess. Practically everybody who was anybody, all the big stars. . . . I had a hit with B.B. King "Whole Lotta Lovin'." And also "Careful With The Fool" that B.B. did. He got a hit off "Whole Lotta Lovin'." Etta James' second thing she did was number one; and Junior Parker's "Stranded In St. Louis."

Thomas: Was "Stranded In St. Louis" a personal lyric?

Harris: Naw!

Thomas: You just made it up?

Harris: I write a lot of things. I don't know why, but to me there's something about Memphis, Texas. . . . I've used a lot of phrases about Texas and Tennessee. I guess because the blues to me is like Tennessee, like the Mississippi delta. That's its home, you know. Memphis, being a sporting center. . . .

Did you see the movie *Leadbelly*? When I was a kid in my hometown, they had places where people tasted their homebrew, you know. Drank beer. They'd have a little corn liquor there. They'd sit back, you know. Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, something like that. They'd be at a house . . . called it a "house." Out in the country, law didn't come around there.

They had these dudes . . . I knew these two cats. One had a violin, one had a guitar. See, they's come there and play for drinks. Pass the hat, you understand. And get down!

Thomas: That was a show?

Harris: Yes, sir! Just like guys would play on the streets. Mostly they'd go around to those houses that I was talking about.

They'd have a little party sometimes, what they'd call "suppers." There'd be a "supper" at somebody's house. What they'd mean, see, is that they'd have fish and stuff for sale, you understand. Beer and homebrew, bootleg whiskey. They'd have somebody over in the corner with the records playing or the piano . . . somebody'd be going in the back gambling. You know, breaking on down till daylight.

Thomas: Wasn't there a time there was a lot of music on the street in Houston? On Dowling Street?

Harris: Um hmmm. Lightnin' Hopkins played on Dowling.

Thomas: Who'd they play for?

Harris: Anybody that would listen. I never actually seen it, but he was telling me about it. Man, there's so much. . . . I'd like to see somebody write a book that is *authentic.*

". . . There are a lot of people who made very definite contributions . . . a lot of people are lost, forgotten."

Thomas: You wrote "Sweet Black Angels" with . . .

Harris: Joe Hughes. I put Joe Hughes' name on it because he helped me a lot. "Red River Blues" was written with Nelson Carson. I'll tell you why. I was over at Nelson's house in Ashdown, Arkansas, one day visiting. There's a creek runs around by his house and he said, "Listen at this:

Red River, Red River
Red River runs right by my door . . . "

But that's all I remembered. But I liked the phrase, I liked the idea, so I just wrote a song about Red River. Since I got the idea from him, I put his name on it. But I wrote the lyrics.

Thomas: Was that the Red River in Texas?

Harris: Oh, I don't know what river it is! Ha hah! I just pictured "Red River" and I see where it's coming from. What I'm saying, you can see it, just living down in the country. Just like "One Room Country Shack." What it says is this, you can understand. Like I wrote about Tennessee.

During the days a long time ago when folks was around and up and down Red River, well . . . cat's living out in the country, he wants to get to some urban center, you understand. He'd want to get on down to Memphis or Cairo, Illinois. Somewhere where it was jumping. During them times they were like nice hustling towns for "sweetbacks" they called 'em. Pimps, gamblers. Blues singers. They'd sing:

Drop me off in Memphis . . .

or anywhere down the line. Just like the *Leadbelly* movie. You see how they rode all those freight trains and things until they found one of those good towns, some of them broads, you understand. He's home free, he's sharp.

I'll tell you what I like . . . there's a song B.B. did. I like the mention of towns, especially historical towns as far as the Negro or Black culture is concerned. We have a lot of songs like that. I mean, songs about Harlem, songs about 47th Street in Chicago, songs about 18th and Vine in Kansas City, Beale Street in Memphis. You see, these were landmarks. We lost a lot of this with the advent of integration. Our landmarks cease to be, now.

If you really covered historical . . . like you say, uh . . . as Big Joe says . . . says.

Well, I been to Kansas City
Boy, everything was really all right
Well, the lads jump and sing
Until the broad daylight

he say

Well, I dreamed last night
I was standing on 18th and Vine

You *know* he's into where it is!

Yes, I dreamed last night
I was standing on 18th and Vine
I shook hands with Piney Brown
And I could hardly keep from crying.

Well, see, anybody from around Kansas City would know he's talking about the hustling kind of people . . . they'd always be on 18th and Vine.

Then he said, and guess what:

I took a stroll on 47th Street . . .

Hey Jack! That was Big June Richmond or somebody . . . did that song about 47th Street in Chicago.

Thomas: Do you know anything about Oklahoma City? Ever been there?

Harris: Yeah, I've played Oklahoma City but I didn't know much about it.

Thomas: Well, I guess 6th Street would have been the scene in Oklahoma City. But it hasn't worn well at all. . . . Well, like everything else, I guess.

Harris: Um hmmm. You take our landmarks . . . Dowling Street and Lyons Avenue in Houston are known all over the world. If you wanted to see somebody from your hometown in Houston, man, they would show up there.

Thomas: As you said, the whole business of integration has really changed our life a great deal.

Harris: Yeah, for instance, you take the Theresa Hotel in Harlem. Everybody used to be at the Theresa.

Thomas: Fidel Castro stayed there.

Harris: Yeah, man. Whoever's who! When you're in New York . . .

Thomas: Fidel Castro, when he came from Cuba in the early '60s insisted that he *must* stay at the Theresa Hotel . . . when he came to speak at the United Nations. Kennedy didn't like that, but Castro says this is the scene where the *people* are. Ha hah hah!

Harris: Hey, man! Ha hah! When I first went to New York, I was working for a promoter out of West Virginia called "the beautiful Red" . . . Apple Red Taylor. So I went on to New York when I finished his tour. I'd never been to New York before. My manager was Ben Da Costa and I stayed downtown with Ben a day or two. I didn't know Red was coming

Missouri and Pacific Railroad, Louisiana.

Like I say, Alan Freed had people like Fats Domino and Buddy Holly . . . Cooper had acts with lesser names, but they were still stars as far as us kids were concerned.

to town. So Red came on and came on downtown. He told us, "Well, come on, Slim. I'm gonna take you up to Harlem; you don't want to be down here with no paddy folks."

So we went to the Theresa Hotel, so I wanted to get a room and they said they didn't have no room. But, see, Red's a gangster out of West Virginia . . . all his friends are like Bumpy Johnson, (Casper) Holstein. They were called "partners," they were just like *that!* All gangsters. So they said they didn't have a room; we said, "Well, that's alright."

So we went in the bar, you know. Arthur Finley was in there with Johnson . . . Hey! The bitch came a-runnin' and got me a suite! Ha ha! But they didn't have no room! Heh heh heh!

Thomas: Yeah, right . . .

Harris: He took that place, yeah. He had Bumpy Johnson come up there . . . he lived out in Long Island. I guess he just got through doing fifteen . . . or either had fifteen to do. No, had just got through. But, you see, Red and Bumpy and all, they were the only cats still running numbers. Red had the operation in West Virginia. Bumpy was stone right out gangster. I understand that during Prohibition, Dutch Schultz took over . . .

Thomas: The numbers?

Harris: In Harlem. But, see, Bumpy'd rob all their runners. He'd just *take* the money! See, the mob was trying to run the niggers out of business in Harlem . . . they were going to take over Harlem. But Bumpy'd just take the money away from 'em. Like Red said, "Bumpy just walked up and down 125th Street. He'd just go up and talk to 'em and tell 'em how much money he wanted."

Thomas: And then take it?

Harris: They gonna *give* it to him! They was paying off. They'd just pay him off, you know, at certain times. They'd rather do that than have him blow them up. Oh, and he looked like a little doctor! Bald-head dude. That *Shaft* picture had a cat portraying Bumpy . . . in that first *Shaft* picture. But I met Bumpy. Boy, he was a hell of a gangster.

But the Theresa, just like I said, had the original thing honoring Joe Louis. And, you know, Sugar Ray (Robinson)'s joint was right almost next door. All the players hung out there. Willie Bryant.

Thomas: Palm Cafe?

Harris: Well, the Palm Cafe was . . . like the Theresa's here and you go down this way . . .

Thomas: Yeah, about half a block.

Harris: Yeah, across the street there, the same side the Apollo Theatre is on. The Palm and the Shalimar. Ralph Cooper was broadcasting there.

Thomas: I was just about to ask you about Ralph Cooper. He was another one, like Larry Steele, who needs to be talked about.

Harris: Yeah, Willie Bryant, too. A real light-skinned dude, he played in a lot of Black movies that were produced out of New York.

Thomas: Ralph Cooper was interesting. When I was a kid he was producing a lot of shows. At that time, they were Rock & Roll shows. He wasn't making it as big as Alan Freed because he didn't have the same kind of connections. But he was producing a show at the Valencia Theatre in Jamaica . . . a talent show and Rock & Roll show. Like I say, Alan Freed had people like Fats Domino and Buddy Holly . . . Cooper had acts with lesser names, but they were still stars as far as us kids were concerned. I remember Ralph Cooper very well; that was the very end of his career when I first saw him.

Harris: Well, you know, when I was a kid . . . Ralph Cooper, Manton Moreland, Willie Bryant . . . a host of 'em . . . did a lot of good things. But it was to a limited audience.

Thomas: An all Black audience?

Harris: Yes. And you take people like Nipsey Russell and Moms Mabley, Bill Bailey, Slappy White, Redd Foxx, and those guys . . . they were never seen down here. Because there were no theaters down here for them to work in. Until television.

Thomas: What about the old Lincoln Theatre?

Harris: Acts like that didn't come there. Pigmeat Markham might have come there, every once in a blue moon.

Thomas: Was there not enough money down here?

Harris: I don't think it was a matter of money so much as it was the matter of a place to play. The theaters didn't do the kind of thing down here, I mean, like they did on the east coast.

Thomas: Houston was still pretty much "country south"?

Harris: Like it is now. But it's just a funny thing . . . you didn't find that on the west coast, either. It was strictly like Virginia . . .

Thomas: . . . out to Chicago and Ohio?

Harris: Yeah.

Thomas: What about Birmingham and thereabouts?

Harris: I don't know. I played Birmingham . . . but it was just one-nighters, so I don't know.

Thomas: How about Kentucky? Louisville?

Harris: I don't know. I doubt it, but that influence may have reached down there, too.

Thomas: It's interesting that they had one tradition on the east coast which didn't get out to the rest of the country.

Ralph Cooper was an early major star of Black cinema.

Harris: The Lincoln is a good example. They had shows, but they didn't have the big acts. They had some dancers there . . . they were all local talent. They played at the Peacock Club, that you passed there on the corner. That was a big nightclub; and the El Dorado Ballroom on Dowling. But Moms and that, that was an east coast thing. ■

* * *

Recorded August 1978 in Houston, Texas

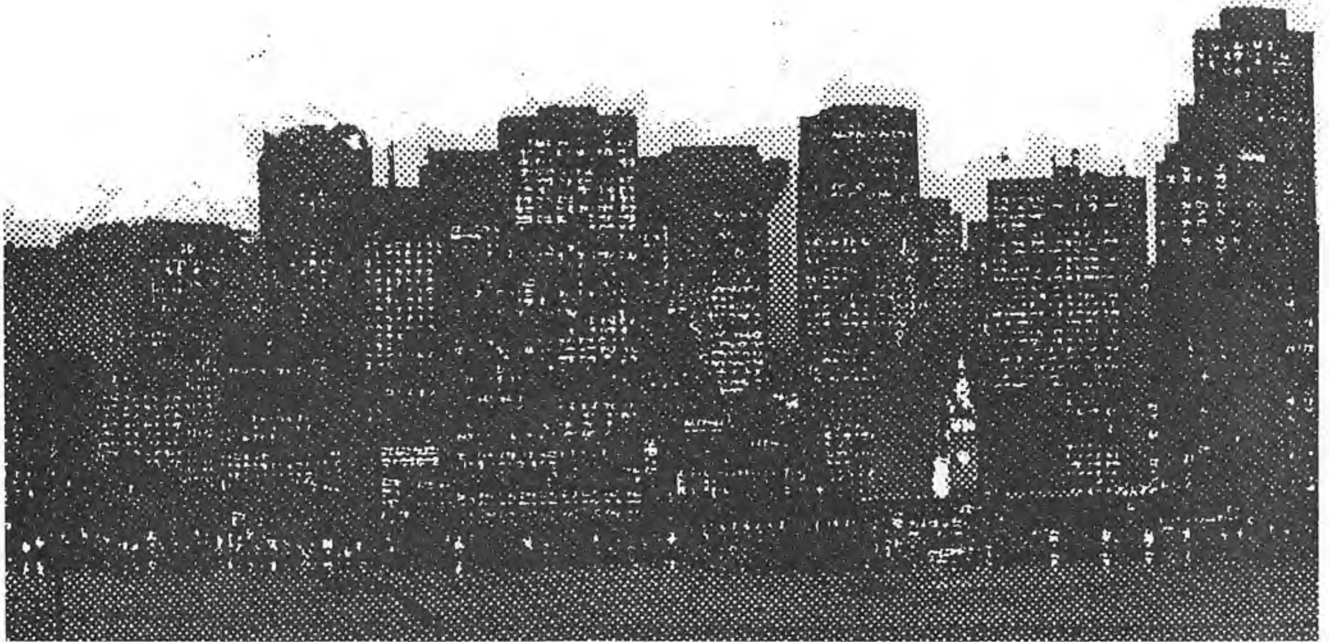
■ **And you take people like Nipsey Russell and Moms Mabley, Bill Bailey, Slappy White, Redd Foxx . . . they were never seen down here. Because there were no theaters down here for them to work in.**

STERLING D. PLUMPP

Inherited Blues

Every day/complaining:
Minding roots of noise.
I hear. I Live. Mean
times howdying howdying
fingers; poking fun
at me/like mocking birds.
Every day/the sun rises
half-way, stops, sinks
back down. The anvil
of hard times/in my chest.
Every day/reminding myself:
just how long/road I'm on.
Nothing but troubles/troubles
in my blood. Nothing/swing
with but skin and soul.
Travelling/nobody seeing me/
a sack over my head. Nobody
hearing/I am alone. I beat/
the anvil and moan. Beat/and
moan

8-29-84



It Is the Blues

(For Bill & Susannah Ferris)

Cuckle burrs snarled
in my hair. And breezes
pesky as mosquitoes.
It is the blues/crawling
over evening for a
feast. Nobody hears
my dungeon screams
as loneliness tapdances
inside my skull.
The windmill of moans
churns and the long gulf
of pain stretches in veins.
It is the blues. The grassy
head of anxiety/coughing
up dues. The under ache
drowning my name. The crackling
hurt sizzling in pots
of memories. Loss and troubles
boiling in my heart. It is
the blues/lowdown in evil.
Sending their spikes
through teeth and spines.
The upset stomach of dreams/
dizzy and longing for rest.
The big boss man of pleas/
calling from his knees.
Pleading for his woman/needing
cause she is gone. Crying
in the wind/begging comfort.
It is the blues. The long road/
crooked with yesterday's steps
and zigzagging with tomorrow's
trails. The wandering journey
through blistered feet. It
is the blues. The shouts
nobody claims to make. The groans
only hard times bake. The pleas
to a hawkish wind. Laughter
that'll make evil grin. Wide-mouthed
screamed out clues. A life paying
its dues. It is the blues . . .

May 28, 1984

Blues

Blues. And the morning lifts
night from its dishrag
of darkness, commences to moan
vines of light climbing
over the horizon
in a vested crimson summoning.
Blues. And the day arrives
spitting pieces of rays
on darkness in transitions.
Blues. And time wakes me
to another pain before executioners
arrive, with commands
from mythology to wipe me
from being. But I'm ready,
ready as anybody can be,
ready for you,
hope you ready for me.
I got ax-handled tears
in the ball of my hand,
drinking bruises and blood
in a alcohol vein,
ain't in no mood
for no jive commands;
ain't in no mood
for no jive commands.
Blues. When I got
out the womb. All red
and underfed. Couldn't lay down
cause the blues all in my bed.
I got this pinching memory
so bad/I don't know
'xactly what to do.
I call on god
but he can't answer;
I call on the devil
but he can't hear;
and I call on the wind
and it comes here. Moved me
round so long
that I can't rest at all.
Blues. I got this pinching memory
so bad/my mind notices
everything that crawls.
Blues. Won't somebody come
tell me the good news.
Feel so low/feel like an empty cistern
in a six month drought.
Everytime I try to move the dust
gits up and dances about.
I got the blues.
And if I forget, I got
everything to lose. But don't
git me wrong cause I ain't
gonna lay down dead. I will
just sing, feel pain, and keep
going ahead . . .

PLUMPP

The Blues I See

(for Nancy Ortenberg)

ruts in souls. floods
rising muddy in hearts.
memories cracked/the marrow
imprisoned in diasporic
wanderings. songs bludgeoned
by genocides/shattered to bits/
hover in my eyes. songs smashed
from tongues of nations:
mandingo, wolof, yoruba,
ashanti, ibo . . . songs crushed
and crushed by tyranny.

journey through midnights.
sounds of desperate owls/hooting
in veins/soon overboard. soon
meshed in anonymity. journey
through silence-bled hours.
where spirits wither from anemia.
journey into perpetual lashes.

long roads and troubles. where
nobody knows your name because
it is changed and changed by
whips. long roads and mothers
and fathers gone; children
orphaned to stillbirths. lovers
with somebody else and debts
falling like hail. long roads
and hope struggling inside a jug;
reaching for windows of day. the
blues I see . . .

October 7, 1984

Groove

1.
old niggers
never die.
they
just.
dance hoodoo
on god's schemes.

2.
blues. is the floor.
souls congregate. on.
the meeting.
passion. lives will
to rafts.

3.
minstrels. with
out stages. blues.
singers. sometimes.
they mimic dreams.
only those
beneath history.
allege to.
know

4.
when night hits bones
tongues wing into moods.
as meanings glide
somewhere between whips
and revolt. and we title
the magicians homing songs.
into movement. duke. prez.
and the count of boogies.
head nods and foot pats.
accept.

PLUMPP

Billy Branch

I wear the song/behind
the years others forgot.
I play yesterday and sing
tomorrow. My cupped hands
and breath/talk about me
and you. About dirt roads
and dew. About needing a
woman and being blue. I play
me and I play you. The
goodtimes and the bad. Black
eyes and the best loving
you ever had. About lies
slick folks tell and about
seeing them caught in their
hell. I sing about dreams
that never come true. About
pains and aches too. I wear
the song/behind the years
others forgot. My face is
mischief and halo; I stick
you with my fork and sooth
you with my wings. I am
the boogie man . . .

SOB

*True Believers on the road.
Bringing the news. Bearing
our blues. Truebloods on the
road. History in veins of
their riffs, moans, screams,
and boogies. They come from
a hundred midnights of longings.
Bringing the news. Bearing our
blues. From Robert Johnson's
"Sweet Home Chicago"/hellhounds
on their trail. True Believers
on the road. True Bloods. From
John Lee Hooker's beat and slow
rhythms/working sunup to sundown
in cottonfields; the Mississippi
sun and hardships/rising in
his eyes. From Elmo James/his
pain hurting them too. Bringing
the new. Bearing our blues.
They hoboed "Smokestack Lightning"
with Howlin Wolf/getting on the
pony of naked winds. Bucking way
up in the middle/of Sunnyland palms
of a harmonica playing sky. Bearing
our blues. From Lucille's/slim
strings of wonder/menchildren
of tomorrow. Bringing the news.
Sons of blues. Bearing our news.
Sons of blues. Sons of blues*

PLUMPP

Blues For Leon Forrest

I got the blues of a fallen
teardrop. Prostrate on the mercy
bosom/pushed down, way down/a long
ways from home of the spirit. Way
back home/in a corner where big foots
of indifference/steps on my patented
leather hopes. Deep down near
wayfaring roots and Lucifer socked
conspiracy in scars of wayside dwelling
children/living in the Bucket of Blood
of despair. I got the real/unbaptized
blues. Bone dust of lost souls blues.
I got the Invisible Man cellar blues.
That's why I be so bad I hire
a metaphysical wheelbarrow to haul
my scrambled soul around. Got the bone
dust blues/testified before a sky.
Dripping with blood of my folks.
The fallen teardrop blues. Water
rinsed red in polluted eyelids
of clouds/acid alienness of hate
and oppression. The apocalypse blues
of falling eyewater/drifting down
unabridged cracks in concern. Falling
slowly down blues. The soundless
disappearances of dreams in a teardrop.
I got the blues/a long ways from Satchmo
and the mask of my humanity. I got
the long ways from home blues/got
the fallen teardrop blues

Burning Up in the Wind

Got a little story I like to tell
when that sweet thing done left you
when your nerve soother done gone
and you talk about it, can't help yourself

I'm twisting, turning, lifted higher and higher
I'm twisting, turning, lifted higher and higher
Whoever said you need a plane to fly, sure is a liar

Because I am tossed, turned, and all belted down
Because I am tossed, turned, and all belted down
When I look I am ninety miles above the ground

My easy roller done gone and I got the begging sin
My easy roller done gone and I got the begging sin
All hot and sweating cause I'm burning up in the wind

If you got a good thing, don't ever live a lie
If you got a good thing, don't ever live a lie
Cause you might end up hanging from a cross of fire

Like a lynchee, Lord, flames reaching for my face
Like a lynchee, Lord, flames reaching for my face
My baby's gone and there just ain't no hiding place

My easy roller done gone and I got the begging sin
My easy roller done gone and I got the begging sin
All hot and sweating cause I'm burning up in the wind

May 8, 1984

PLUMPP

CHARLIE R. BRAXTON

By Ademola Olugebefola

HEAR NO EVIL

do not speak to me of peace
do not tell me tall tales of wealth
and prosperity
tell me the truth
and you can spare me the tired lecture
on america's moral obligation to the free world
because
mine eyes have seen the gory
here
in the belly of the beast
where
the great wicked whore of babylon
speaks no truth
but does much evil
today's free world
turns tomorrow's bright eyed youth
into blind soldiers
marching off to die
in senseless wars
no
no
don't tell me any more
i've had it up to here
with your filthy lies
my cup
filled with painful frustrating
emotions
explode
spilling blood
blood
omnipotent blood
on the rocky road to
freedom

BRAXTON

WORKING THE NIGHTSHIFT

(at B.C. Rogers' Chicken Plantation)

3 o'clock monday evening
just about the time
when most of your workingclass brothers
begin to think about quitting

you enter the plant dog tired
from a long weekend of trying
to forget last week's work
& yesterday's bills
that are still overdue today

but the pungent smell of dead chickens
instantly become bitter reminders
that your cutting career at B.C. Rogers
is far from being over

to think
yesterday you were a high school/college
graduate with big dreams of being
a big man in a small town —
your town

but it aint your town
& cuttin' stinking dead chickens
really aint your kind of a job
but it's the only job you got
& thank God you got one
(I aint) the guy up the street doesn't
& neither does the girl next door
but B.C. Rogers Chicken Plant(ation)
is hireing & fireing
new slaves to fill new slots
left by old
slaves whose hands are bloody raw & tired
of slaving for minimum wage
while the rich folks in Pinehurst
eat fried chicken, bake chicken, broiled chicken
chicken catchatori, chicken-alla-wendy, chicken —
alla-king
& poor folks eat chicken feet, chicken necks
chicken gizzards, chickenstew (with no chicken)
chicken backs
SAY WHAT!? CHICKEN BUTT!!!!!!!!!!!

don't you wish that all rich folks
would turn into a plucked chicken
& fly into a vat of hot grease
& let us poor folks eat good for a while

BRAXTON

NIA DAMALI

(Pat Stegall)

YOUR SONG

Hey me
what's on your mind
besides poetry, black men,
politics, and music
come on
talk to me
mother, girl,
sister of self
entity
peace speaks from within
like whispering griots
chanting naked songs
but this is your song,
your script
laid open, raw
touch soul with brown fingers,
harmonizing one's own gender
wake up,
child, poet,
earth baby
the universe
feels blood channeling,
connecting veins,
through space and air
tune into spirit pulsation
listen to one's beat,
feel peace
mother, girl,
sister of self
entity
feel peace
for it is your song
I sing.

I AM NATURAL

i am natural
smoothed down driftwood,
polished in mahogany sculpture
of an african goddess
singing in swahili.

i am natural
as my mama
when bent knees
cleaned for white folks
to feed black babies.

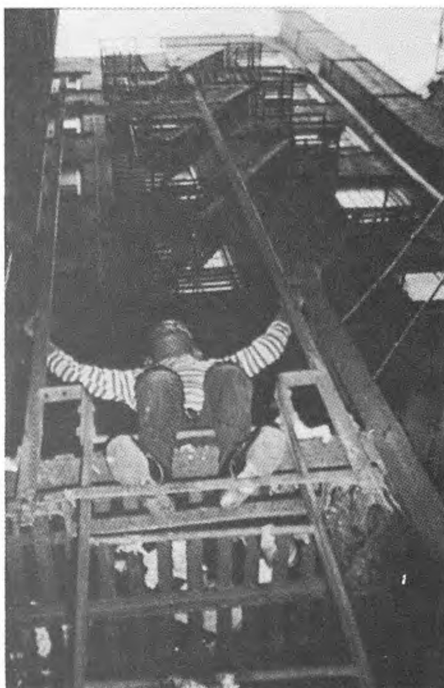
i am natural
like blackeye peas, collard greens, and fatback
when cornrowing my hair
after morning chores
drinking cold buttermilk
as i watched wrinkled fingers
quilt beneath mississippi sun.

i am natural
as my afro
with black skin
reading revolution
and writing love poems
i am natural
when there is nothing else
for me to be,
but natural,
as i am.

BIRTH OF A POET

I remember
dark pissy stairways
broken elevators
compressed dreams
when pride was
covered by distraught
writings on cement walls
D-love
Stone-love
Fuckyou-love
anybody's-love
but there wasn't any love
when love died unnaturally
or when I mounted
twelve flights of stairs
behind old men and women
who ate pork
instead of blood pressure pills
or niggers who just
wanted a free grind

continued on next page



DAMALI

I remember
when gangs
were the in thing
like afros and peace signs
but, we destroyed
one another, nevertheless
with guns, wine,
and bullshit
while mama's love
made everything so serene
I felt safe in my cage
as social workers scanned
for new prey
watching babies cry
for free milk
in the arms of young mothers
who somehow got caught up
in the shit
folks congregated once a month
for government checks
while project overseers
planted flowers
on inanimate grass
camouflaging exterior
from its reality
of mice and mazes
an experiment for all
genocidals to see

I remember
the Black Panthers,
Hanrahan, and Daley
how they shot up
Fred's crib at 4:30 a.m.
and Barbara, whose teeth
and blood mingled fresh
in the stairway
after the morning rape
how I waited, often on
lightless elevators
checking for safety
I took deep breaths
and jumped on
hoping no one
would kick it,
hurt me,
or try to feel
on my ass
while funny hat women
with children
march to church
on Sundays for Jesus

Most of all
I remember
love, kinship, and struggle
when muslims tried
to sell Muhammad Speaks *papers*
as jukeboxes blasted,
"stay"
to grinding bodies,
between bops,
when George Jackson and Bobby Seale
were incarcerated
and Eldridge Cleaver laid low for the code
I had to become a poet
I had to survive
THE MADNESS.

DAMALI

"He Walks Tall . . ." Woodcut by Michael Kelly Williams, 1973

TEXT AND POLITICS
in jazz criticism

JIMMY STEWART

"The offended bourgeois laughs at the songs; the saint and the seer hear them with tears."

Herman Hesse

In an essay titled, "On the Marketability of Improvised Music" published in the *Grackle* magazine #5, 1979, I wrote, "By 'Popular music' I mean all of the musics that enjoy the familiar acceptance of a majority of people in a society and broadly speaking all popular music contains, to one or another degree, three significant features: (1) a professional segment of trained and skilled musicians; (2) an

"Excitement, beauty and fulfillment": At the Shalimar, 1986.

association with cities; (3) the presence of a considerable amount of orality. In the 'high' music culture the popularity in the enjoyment of music is just the opposite, and though there is an obviously professional feature to it, the oral element is studiously excised from it. For the benefit of simplifying the division between both, let us say there are 'high' and 'popular' cultural wings of music in America." Though in this quotation, I was speaking primarily about Pop music, Jazz, and Symphony music, the thoughts that dogged me reading John Litweiler's book (Wm. Morrow & Co., N.Y. 1984) was that from the tone of it "The Freedom Principle" was not about a popular music, and the "high" music wasn't symphonic music. You wouldn't know it from the panoply of high flown and literary allusions and imagery typical of the literature of the academic poseur. That the book is neither an analysis of the music, nor a history of it in any deep sense, warrants attention-getting for the person with working class political sensibilities; a more direct understanding of how the simulacrum that Mr. Litweiler presents in this book, a picture of a movement in jazz skew with errors. To begin with, popular music and the working class must be associated with popular culture, and popular culture in music and entertainment is what the working class enjoys and identifies with when it is not working. Culture earmarked for people's entertainment and pursuit of pleasure. Excitement, beauty, and fulfillment.

The characteristic which distinguished popular culture from "high culture" is the "removed" or rather "disaffiliated" character associated with that enjoyment that "high" art aficionados usually demonstrate. But my purpose in this article is to suggest a caveat to the reader — that the aloofness and intransigency to this "popular" musical expression by jazz musicians does not manifest on their part, Black individuals, for that reason simply aspiring to be whites.

The topmost consideration of our popular music and jazz production, for the benefit of what I have to say here, is that both of the musics are attached to a market industry that disseminates popular culture. In view of this the significance of this music (jazz) puts it in the forefront of the political confrontation between ourselves and those factors of that market that set up the same simulacrum that Litweiler presents to us in this seemingly innocuous music appreciation book; by virtue of the music's nonpopularity across the market at large. If this comes as a surprise to the reader, that jazz is not a "popular" music, let us examine this because it will be necessary farther down the page to compound this remark by

adding that furthermore this music enjoys a "sentimental," if not "honorary" acceptance among our petit-bourgeoisie and additionally is an annoying source of irritation to those political theorists in particular, who are required by ideological consistency to see to it that the political consciousness of the working class is associated with the popular music of the people and not in this *special* music. Understandable in the struggle for the minds and understanding of the unity and solidarity of the people. However, the widespread participation of a people in the popular realm of their creative production exclusively, blunts that other part of their creative production of our music production that is more narrowly reclusive. In this way the revolutionary faction favors the perpetuation of the conservative aspects of our culture in the interest of gandering the popular support in the leveling communality of the common man and woman. If so far, what I have presented to the reader is an internal contradiction within our group I am about to present contradictions of another sort: inside of the music (jazz) itself, its values and its search for attainment as an "art" music, and the white cultural system.

This is where Litweiler's book becomes extremely crucial to the picture. Musical criticism is the evaluation and analysis of music, with the accompaniment of knowledge and propriety. "Propriety" is of particular interest to us here because it is supposed to mean the quality of a thing, the state of being proper and inoffensive, and the examination of the political power of words will reveal that what is accepted as "propriety" in the system of the thinking of the writer of this book will not jibe at all with the thinking of the people that create this music. Simply because the language system between the musicians that make this music and the langauge and the words in this book are no more in synchronization than "Ole Black Joe" is with a spiritual.

The political power of words and the language and jazz (Black music) which is not here about the speaking language of the people who are largely responsible for the music, the *lingua franca*, between their tongue and the official language but about the formal literary text (its usages and metaphors) in the writings about jazz as if it is a genre of literary "high" art, though as quietly as it is kept, it is considered a "minor" even "popular" music by literally every writer that has written about it, a "minor" art; even a "popular" art because it is jazz. As dogmatic as it sounds, I have only to point out to you that every "serious" book or essay on the subject of the music is replete with all kinds of references from the "official" system of the "high art" music of the European music aesthetic system, instead of out of a substantial body of written literature about the music from writers more qualifiably closer to the meaning of the music, among, but not completely always, individuals belonging to the group of musicians themselves.

Before I get accused of setting myself up on the horns of the classical bugaboo of the Black writer advocating that only a Black person is capable of writing about jazz, may I explain that if the quantity of the work ignored by the "serious" jazz critic establishment constitutes those works (written by a *maudit* establishment that accompanied the music as its critical auxiliary) then I feel perfectly justified in attributing some ulterior motive to that white (maudit) establishment in the exclusion of their writings from the works by these individuals. I am not foolish or blind not to see the unstated designations of rank and class (not to mention race) that determine what or who succeeds as an entrant to the ranks of high, low or middle art in the structuring of this society. Which determines the status of what not only a person does for a living, but the occupation and the endeavor itself. Which figures in the equation of the forces and factors that mitigate against any hope of attainment individuals may entertain, of surmounting these very real class barriers. The cutting edge of this cultural reality is in this particular music. Since in popular musical expression there appears to be no great hindering and insouciance to it, of the kind that is virtually the nature of things in the case of jazz. If it is true that the more influential segment of the society, composed of a majority of people

Selling culture: '50s album cover, Prince, General Artists Corporation advertisement.

Sarah Vaughan.

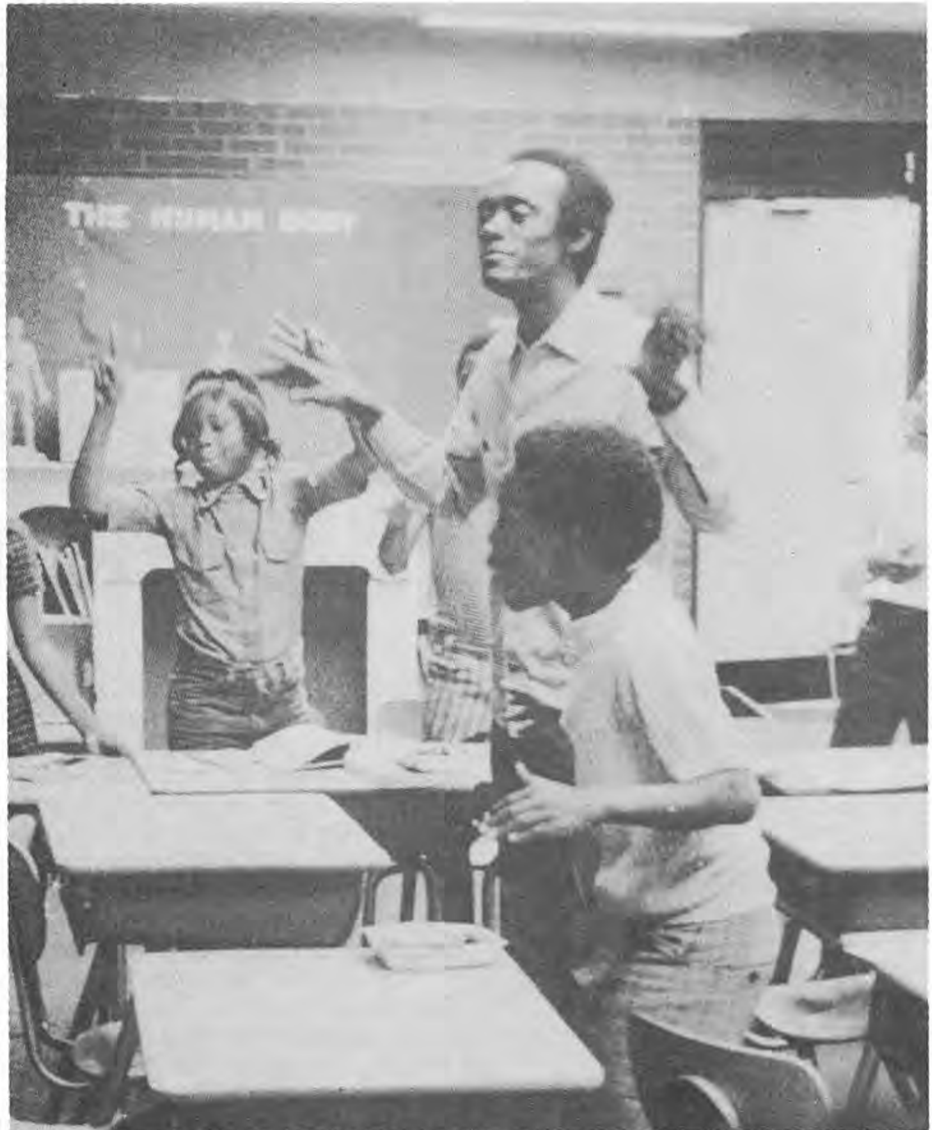
who are mostly white, can enjoy the diversions and amusements of a redoubt group of people (Blacks), the assimilation of popular cultural expression can be taken up by them and incorporated into the general popular culture of the greater society to the extent that Blacks and whites are likely to enjoy it, since by its nature it is a choice of a people, whether working class or upper class, indulging in entertainment "after work" and political seriousness; that laughing, dancing and drinking personify as a social activity. The absence of, or alternative to this political seriousness that constantly dogs jazz. This music (jazz) constantly assails the bastion of the music establishment. Anathema to every sacrosanct tenet of beauty and musical history the Mediterranean European can devise, as black is to white. From Aristotle interdicting musicians to play for free, (see infra) the *diabolus* fourth proscribed by the medieval church as the musical interval of the devil and forbidden to be played. The interval incidently of the flatted fifth, which is the mainstay of BeBop music. And even the use of the contrafactum which was roundly condemned as a practice; [1] that came to be so intelligently utilized by Bird and Diz in the heydays of the music.

Though evidence seem to indicate that the use of the contrafact, the figures or melodies that Bird and Diz created over standard songs were conceivably, in practice a means of circumventing the payment of the mechanical royalties to the composers of the standards, I must hasten to exculpate the men who wrote these new "compositions" on the basis of the fact that the circumstances of those early periods of this new music were so fraught with difficulties that could hardly be surmounted by the Black musicians if some conciliatory compromise wasn't struck between the musicians themselves and the record producers with agreements of compensatory reward of a kind contrary to a rigid conformance to the letters of the law of the copyright. This is worth noting in light of the fact that in none of the writings about jazz music from Hodier, Kofsky, Collier, Sidran, to this book by Litweiler, on the basis of the economic reality of the artist mired in

the generic category of music under the auspices of a larger music category, do the musicians have to struggle through the added obfuscation of a critical language that cannot be understood either by the people who are mostly responsible for it, or the people, who I think who most seriously read this magazine — the working class people.

The Freedom Principle is a tawdry representation of the kind of book written by an "authority" that doesn't know a thing at all about what he is writing about. Who proceeds to give to the reader an unbroken string of artificial and pompous phrases and adjectives that border on the ridiculous. For example, try this one out: ". . . Roach's constructivist designs . . ." A non-musician music appreciator, without a doctorate or a MFA could not be blamed if he or she interprets this to mean that Max's drum work is composed of elements he or she understands as those one would associate with designs characterized by decidedly constructive means. But my guess would be that Mr. Litweiler is saying something entirely different. A reference, actually extremely cursory, to a movement in modern art painting that was dubbed "constructivism" that came out of Russia as the avant garde subsidiary to the Bolshevik Revolution but eventually fell into disfavor and at odds to Revolutionary Socialist Realism principles. To hitch an analogy such as that to an impression of a drumming could probably be presumed by the percussionist in question as a compliment or sheer flattery. Provided the percussionist understood (which I am quite sure Max did) what the phrase " . . . Roach's *constructivist* designs . . . " meant. But you have to excavate an awful lot of stuff to get to a lot of what John Litweiler has written, in the book about Jazz, to decide whether he is "kicking" or "kissing" the music. He *is* "kissing" the music.

My point is that this *lingua franca* that the Bourgeoisie and the upper class speak to each other with, is not directed to the working class at all. This is unfortunate, because it puts jazz in the middle of the political tug-of-war where language is employed to



Marion Brown teaching at Martin Luther King Jr. School, New Haven, Connecticut.

The Freedom Principle is a tawdry representation of the kind of book written by an "authority" that doesn't know a thing at all about what he is writing about.

Seventh Avenue, Harlem: Milford Graves.

perpetuate the status quo. Familiar though we are with the way a *lingua franca* is employed to enable the interposing group to get across what it wants the group imposed upon, to do in this mix of words, out of the vocabulary of each of their languages, usually associated with the colonial situation between whites and an oppressed people, my accuracy in the use of the word in this situation should bear more attention since Litweiler's book is not directed to that market of readers that in my stereotype are to be the autochthonous group of readers whom John Litweiler is going to bring the message of the beauty of jazz. Because if that was his intention his language would defeat his purpose. Rather, I contend that his "natives" are the non-practitioners of *any* kind of music of the middle and upper classes and that this argot a *lingua franca* in that sense. Where the references and analogy he used are understood between them. Let me try a few more on you:

"Although he achieves *rococo excess* in Dameron's *Soultrane*," . . . p.85 " . . . structural *golden mean*: . . ." p. 160 (Italics mine).

Litweiler is absolutely welcome to write that he sees images of works by Gabo, Pevsner and Tatlin when he lis-

tens to the Drumming of Max Roach or some business about elaborate ornamentation of musical lines that remind him of Tiepolo.[2] But to whom do you communicate these analogies when the people who create those musical performances are treated as if they create them *ab nihil*, in as far as the sources that are used are a part of the establishment, and not that of the individuals that create them?

The gravamen of this paper is that the emphasis on the intangibilities of music, such as the way it makes one feel, the ability in it to communicate in ways that transcend the spoken word, and the basic and fundamental reason that it is a respite from the stress and routine of daily living, are real and justifiable reasons from the people who express them. But these reasons have to be balanced by the tangible aspects of music. And to the extent that books such as those written by men and women who enjoy the music like John Litweiler, are solely based on the intangibilities of the music, they are more of a liability to an understanding of the music than they are an asset. Not to say that the intangibilities of music are not important. The tangible aspects of music are readily known to musicians themselves. A few I have already cited above. But to the person who is a non-musician who reads a book of this sort the observation should be made that the conditions in the tangible physical and social life of the musicians in the acknowledgment of their unique contribution, instead of focusing on an emphasis on the trends and movement of the music as if it is a system completely apart from the social system. The gravamen Black writers direct at white writers writing about jazz is the culpability these writers share with the other members of their own group in the constriction of the tangible marketable potential of jazz. Even textual objection to those writing does little toward contributing to the elimination of the problem, because the books are published and read on the basis of their entertainment value, which is an important part of literature. But literature has another function. And unless you are treating jazz as if it is a gourmet food and your book a cookbook, which I consider these

(Top) Academy Anniversary Concert and Ball, Philadelphia. (Above) Church congregation singing "We Shall Overcome."

The "folk" rooted arts and music (including jazz here) are attached and exposed to consumption so rigidly tied to a market that is "used up" constantly, as opposed to a "cultured" market where the emphasis on the preservation of what it produces is based on those that expenditure it, . . . Where they in effect, "stock" it instead of "spending" it.

books by these writers to resemble, the subject of this music would hardly be worth the trouble of being included in what used to be referred to in the sixties as "theoretical" magazines and journals, viz., *Soul Book*, *Cricket*, *The Black Scholar*, *Liberator* and a few others.

The function of Litweiler's work is a *fait accompli*, a finished fact. But after books are completed and are put on the market, another production of writings arises in regard to them. "Theoretical" writings, in the nature of those that are published in this magazine serve to contribute to the analytical thinking of the working class who occasionally or undoubtably read those "Cook Books." Considering the publishing features of hardback books with those of magazines, with those between "highbrow" music production and consumption and Jazz, compared to popular music, the picture of the revenue derived by musicians in Jazz compared to those of concert performers (symphonic) might lead us to assume that in terms of constant monetary flow the jazz performer, who seemingly performs with more frequency than the concert artist, derived more occasions for royalty payments for his labor than what is available to a symphony virtuoso. Thus the true picture of the "higher" valorization of "high art" music does not jibe with the actual earnings of those performers compared to jazz or popular music performers. The prestige associated with this music of "culture" obfuscates some economic realities. If from what I have said so far would seem to indicate that contrary to the commonly held view of our music as a whole, that jazz musicians are better off as wage-earners than "academic" musicians, then what is the fuss all about from these musicians, toward the industry as a whole? Clearly, since per capita jazz musicians do not earn as much from their craft as their symphony counterparts, have I just contradicted what I have just said? Actually, no. The difference exists in the way and in the rate of the liquidation of the earnings in each division.[3]

The "folk" rooted arts and music (including jazz here) are attached and exposed to consumption so rigidly tied to a market that is "used up" constantly, as opposed to a "cultured" market where the emphasis on the preservation of what it produces is based on those that expenditure it, do so miserly. Where they in effect, "stock" it instead of "spending" it. This boils down in the same way that magazines are "used-up" in a more rapid disposal market than hardback books, which represent a more permanent storing of what is written than when it does when it is an essay or an article in a weekly, or monthly or quarterly magazine or journal. This is why those things that are written that are eventually transferred from the essentially *feuilleton* publishing track, to the permanent state of being in a bound hardback book (like poetry and articles of this sort) represent by being collected under one hardback cover a "higher" system of operations, a more "refined" and "serious" place where the writings takes on the *panache* of the "collected writings or collected works" of so and so writer. To Mr. Litweiler's credit, he does quote quite copiously from liner notes, interviews and an occasional "theoretical" article out of *Cricket* — incidentally, the only theoretical source quoted in his book.

From the throwaway issuances such as the *Village Voice* and other magazines, as opposed to books which are apt to be kept on bookshelves. And since music packaged in albums are more inclined to be "collected" by the purchaser of the album, than discarded as he or she might do after reading a tabloid published piece, or an article in a magazine, all music recorded in albums have the same *heft* as things that are written that are published in books. The difference in music would be determined very importantly on the preferences of the buyers who would buy what he or she liked and by the additional prodding and nudging of the reviews, things that writers like Mr. Litweiler recommend. Because of the ethereal nature of music, the marketing of music relies very heavily on words. Words that are written on paper. Ergo, if it is John Litweiler's intention to "sell" the music of "jazz after 1958" to initiates and others who are reluctant to entertain the possiblity that they might come to

"The 'folk' rooted arts and music . . . "

enjoy this music, he avers only to those who can understand the terms and the language he uses, from clearly the usages he employs. The efflorescence of the "freedom" school of jazz after 1958 seems a hollow claim, and what I read belies the situation of the state of things in jazz at the moment.

The music now is a tufaceous music made up of potsherds of old guard BeBop, rhythm-rock jazz, fusion and Energy. The final and base line of everything, the profit system principles of business that spurn not only the interest and enthusiasm of the corporate record companies that publish this music in albums, but the print industry as well, under its own culture. Those that read these books who will buy this book, as well as another one that is now "hot-off-of-the-press" by another of Mr. Litweiler's associates. If everything is as rosy as Mr. Litweiler makes it appear to seem, you can be sure something is not right in truth.

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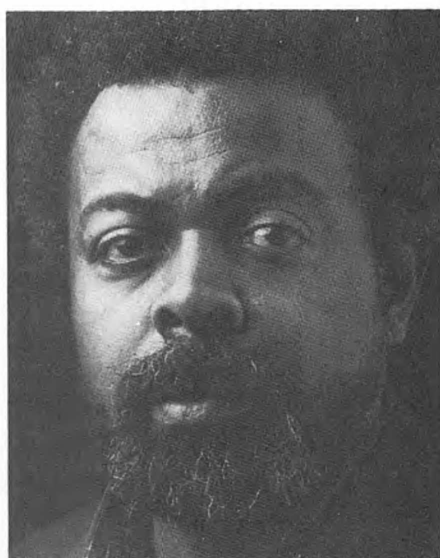
[1] (Cf. Politics, Bk VIII, Ch. 7, cf. Helmholtz, cf. J.F. Agricola in the Best Collection of Musical Writings (Schreiben Eines Musikalischen Liebhabers (Hamburg, 1749))

[2] (Giambattista Tiepolo, an 18th century painter. Naum Gabo and his brother, Antoine Pevsner and the sculptor, Valdimir Tatlin are all associated with the constructivism movement in Russia in the 1920s.)

[3] (See Amer. Fed. of Musician Survey reported in a *Business World* Report (1961))

AMIRI BARAKA:
JOHN COLTRANE, JAZZ & POETRY



Amiri Baraka.

An Interview by

JOEL LEWIS

Lewis: When I started thinking about this interview I began playing a lot of my John Coltrane albums again. I realized it had been almost 18 years since he died and I really didn't think it had been that long and I was wondering how often do you think about John Coltrane? How much of a part does he play in your own consciousness — you as a person, as a writer?

Baraka: I listen to Trane's music all the time so I'm sure it has quite a bit of significance — I'm always listening to the music

and I'm writing something about him . . . so that's another thing.

Lewis: Do you find it hard to write about him?

Baraka: No, it's not hard, it's just that a lot of people don't want to really deal with Trane. Even my publisher didn't really want to deal with the book for a long time. I'm not interested in writing a biography, I'm really trying to understand how art itself changes and why it is what it is . . . This fascinates me.

Lewis: Have you read the three biographies that have been done on Coltrane, and what did you think of them?

Baraka: Well, they're biographies . . . they have some information in them, though none of them agrees with the others on the information they have; but they are a useful source of biographical information and I refer to them in my book. But as I said: I'm more interested in the music. I'm interested in Trane's life as a kind of shaper of music. I'm interested in all the elements that helped shape Trane and the music and their interrelationship.

Lewis: When did you first meet John Coltrane?

Baraka: I first met him when he was first playing with Miles Davis, or at least got close enough to say something to him. I don't think I *really* met him until he began playing with Thelonious Monk in the late '50s.

Lewis: I guess that was the legendary 5-Spot band. . . . What kind of effect did seeing this group have on you? Were you writing at the time?

Baraka: Yeah, I was writing . . . But Trane has always been an inspiration throughout his life. . . . The way he played was always inspiring to me because it always set me thinking in a new direction . . . it gave out a lot of energy and it was *so* powerful, there was a kind of visionary sense to what he played — energizing — Visionary

(From left) Charles Parker and Dizzy Gillespie with John Coltrane on 52nd St., 1950.

and imagistic in its effects on me.

Lewis: What kind of person was Coltrane in everyday life?

Baraka: Trane was a very quiet, humble kind of person. He was the kind of person that absorbed a lot. He was very sensitive, very perceptive, but very quiet. He was quick not only to absorb things, but to understand and interpret them. Trane heard a lot of young musicians in the early '60s and absorbed whatever he heard from them at the same time . . . people like Eric Dolphy, John Gilmore, Albert Ayler, Pharoah Sanders — all of whom he influenced — Ornette Coleman, as well as Sonny Rollins. You know, Coltrane heard *all* those people, yet assimilated these as *materials* for his own statement.

Lewis: You did the liner notes to the *Live at Birdland* album — was this Coltrane's request?

Baraka: Yeah. It was his request because I was, at the time, one of the leading writers about the New Music and about Coltrane, and I did a lot of writing for a lot of different magazines. Also, I knew Trane and I was close to the musicians on the scene, so it was a normal selection at the time.

(From left) John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk, Shadow Wilson at the 5 Spot, 1957.

Lewis: Did he like what you said in your notes? A much quoted line of his stated he didn't like the idea of people doing notes for his albums.

Baraka: Well, you know, Trane said the music speaks for itself and there's a lot of truth to that. I think he didn't want to go through the kind of changes people were talking to him about: producing albums, going through interviews and things like that. I can say he was not a talkative kind of person, verbally expressive. He saved his expressions for the horns. But I think he liked what he read.

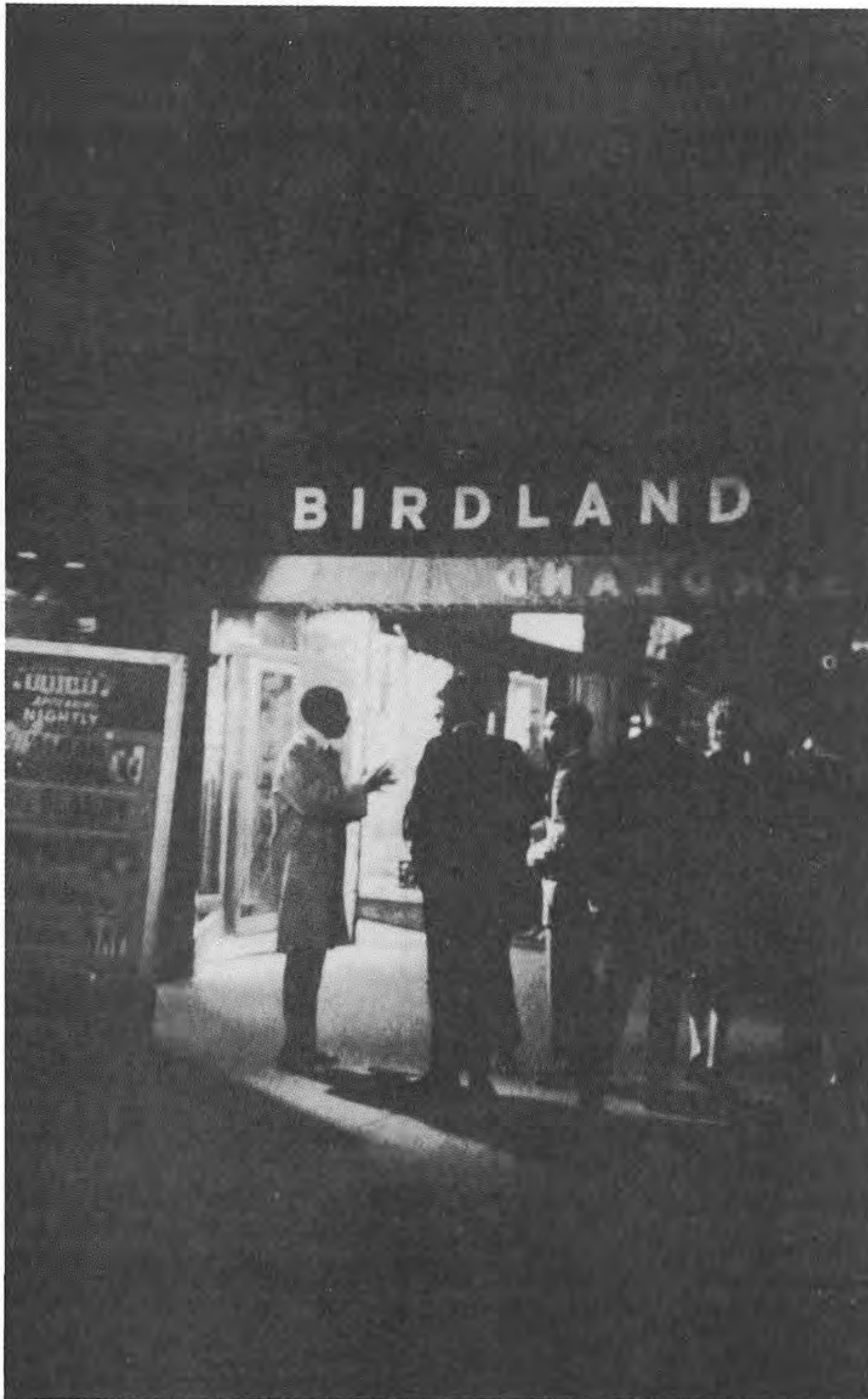
John Coltrane.

Lewis: Did you give him copies of your books? Did he read poetry? — I was always curious about that.

Baraka: He bought one of my books on his own and I know that he had read *Blues People*. . . . there was a general kind of closeness among a lot of Black people in the music and artistic communities at the time. It was a closer-knit, perceived kind of commonality, there were fewer Blacks in the Village at the time, so there was a little more comraderie.

Lewis: Part of the legend that surrounds John Coltrane is the intensely hostile reception that greeted his quintet of '60–'61, with Eric Dolphy — stories that still circulate about 1½ hour performances of a single tune, Coltrane's hair falling out because of this hostility. Did he ever talk to you about this period? Did he ever try to explain what his musical 'quest' was about?

Baraka: No . . . but I think that Trane's basic motivation was in trying to understand what his inside was,



always. He'd hear something and he'd want to play that. . . . combinations of sound, new chords, new ways to utilize chords. Trane was a scientist, a music scientist. What we heard many times were his music experiments, because he'd experiment at the same time he was composing — from sometime in the Monk period, particularly in the next period when he went on to "Sheets of Sound" — he was exploring alternate chords and different ways of phrasing, using a particular note in the chord rather than a particular other note people were used to.

Lewis: If you were to give someone five albums of Coltrane's, to let them know what Trane's music about, what would you give them?

Baraka: Oh, I'd give them *Live at Birdland*. . . . probably *Meditations*, *Coltrane Jazz*, something out of his Prestige catalog — maybe *Tenor Madness* with Sonny Rollins . . . also some of the things he did with Miles Davis: *Miles Ahead* or *Round Midnight*. . . . anyway, try to get something from his different periods.

Lewis: You're not happy with his later recordings. . . .

Baraka: Like *Om*?

Lewis: Yeah, also *Expressions* and *Cosmic Music.*

Baraka: Well, they're a couple of things that were dominated by the metaphysics he was into. But I think to generalize about that is to miss a lot because Trane's music even then was rich and very rewarding. I think he was going more and more into what is called "the wisdom religion": Eastern philosophies and things like that and when you begin to pay attention to it in a consistent way, you begin to reflect that. By the time of his death, Trane had made a couple of albums that were examples of a philosophical focus on metaphysics. I think there was a tendency to go into a thing that turned into its opposite — from an intense emotionalism into a kind of permanent receptivity . . . you know, 'the all-sensitive metaphysician.' But I think it was still a sec-

ondary aspect of the music.

Lewis: But many of those records were released posthumously. Do you think Coltrane would have released all of these sessions?

Baraka: Obviously, we'll never know. . . . the music itself went into a kind of wane because of his death and then, generally, went into that kind of metaphysical thing; a few years later a lot of people who had picked up '60s ornaments began pushing a "tail Europe" music — the Avante-Garde with European concert music as primary influence.

Lewis: You're thinking of Anthony Braxton and his associates?

Baraka: Oh the AACM, St. Louis BAG, the West Coast people. A lot of people are unduly influenced by their music lessons and I think the kind of scene that emerged after the metaphysical period indicates a state of transition.

Lewis: Braxton talks about this period as being 'post-Ayler'. . . . Ayler taking open-ended improvisation as far as it could go.

Baraka: Well those people are into a thing where they just want to kill the blues!

Lewis: Where do you think jazz is heading off towards? After Coltrane's death, there seems to be no 'leaders' or any main trend.

Baraka: As I said, the music went through a period of quiescence and in the last decade it has been developing furiously again. People like David Murray, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, the World Saxophone Quartet, John Hicks, Olu Dara, many young players.

Lewis: What about James Newton and Anthony Davis?

Baraka: I think that James Newton is a very talented flautist, despite some of the 'chamber music' context he has been heard in. The same thing for Anthony Davis.

Anthony Davis, as a sideman, can be listened to. Anthony Davis, left to his own inventions, is a very boring musician. I call it 'the tail-Europe' school and I'm not very interested in it. I can listen to Anton Webern, John Cage, Charles Ives . . . anyone like that . . . I can also listen to Duke Ellington and I'll know how a contemporary wrote music, as utilized in a high art/jazz context. Duke said: "Only two kinds of music: good music and bad music." I understand that, but at the same time if I say 'German music' — if I say that Ludwig von Beethoven is German music — I mean it reflects a particular quality of that national experience and and is translated in aesthetic terms. Afro-American music has a dissimilar aesthetic and I'm not even talking about the musicians playing it, because the best of the white musicians don't sound like they're from Europe — it sounds Afro-American no matter who plays it. You can have Andre Watts play "Eroica" and it still has an expression that comes from the consciousness of a particular people who put it together and, at the same time, it's an international expression.

Lewis: Just to finish off on Coltrane — was he conscious of himself as a Black artist in relation to what he was doing in terms of Black art? — A lot of people, you yourself in *Black Music*, put him in a very strong leadership position, which he seemed very uncomfortable with.

Baraka: I don't know. I think what Trane did was the measure . . . I mean the music was the measure and Trane had his own ideas and thoughts about things. He certainly knew what was happening, about the direction things were going in and he was objectively a leader. A whole lot of people can give you theories and deafening dialogs about what their stuff is about and it's not about *Anything*. But Trane *was* in the leadership of the movement because the music provoked things in our minds that were beyond the commonly perceived. His music has in it a collective kind of expression.

Lewis: And what about 'jazz-poetry' . . . is there such a thing?

Baraka: Yeah . . . there's a jazz-poetry. . . .

Lewis: . . . is it any good?

Baraka: Well I guess it depends on who it is . . . Certainly Langston Hughes is the premiere jazz-poet. I think Afro-American poetry, to a great extent, reflects the aesthetic background it develops out of.

(Above) Amiri Baraka in performance. (Left top to bottom) John Hicks, Olu Dara, Fred Hopkins and Steve McCall, Craig Harris: upholding the hot.

Lewis: What about the relation between poetry and music?

Baraka: It's the same thing, poetry is a form of music, an early form of music. . . . Poetry is the first music. I think the poet predicts music and I don't think you can disconnect poetry from music. — I think when poetry gets away from music, as is the case of academic poetry, it tends to be anti-musical, having more and more to do with rhetoric than it has with music. The more poetry gets disconnected from music, the less interesting it is and the less likely it is to live as poetry.

Lewis: Do you write with the music on?

Baraka: Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't. Always when I write there's a musical emphasis to it.

Lewis: A particular song or riff?

Baraka: Naw, just phrases, rhythm being the principal. Sometimes it's a phrase, wording, words. Generally, a kind of rhythmic insistence.

Lewis: Are there any people, along with Coltrane, who play an important part of your practice, that you keep coming back to?

Baraka: All the great classicists: Duke, Miles, Monk . . . those are the people I keep coming back to, the people that create the classics of the music.

Lewis: Did you have any ambition to play an instrument, or, if you had the chance, would you?

Baraka: Yeah. I used to play the trumpet until I went away to college and then I stopped.

Lewis: Do you think you'd rather had been a hot trumpeter rather than a poet?

Baraka: Well, that's hard to tell . . . I really got involved in the world of words and that was *it*. . . . they were just more impressive to me. ■

taped 12/84 at Baraka's home in Newark

I Love Music

"I want to be a force for real good.
In other words, I know that there are bad forces,
forces that bring suffering to others and misery to the world,
but I want to be the opposite
force. I want to be the force which is truly
for good."
Trane
Trane
Trane sd,
A force for real good, trane. in ther words. Feb '67
By july he was dead.
By july. he said in other words
he wanted to be the opposite
but by july he was dead, but he is, offering,
expression a love supreme, afro blue in me singing
it all because of him
can be
screaming beauty
can be
afroblue can be
you leave me breathless
can be
    alabama
        I want to talk to you
            my favorite things
                like sonny
can be
like itself, fire can be, heart explosion, soul explosion, brain explo
sion. can be. can be. can be. can be. aggeeewheewheeagg eeeee. aggeeouahy
deep deep deep
expression deep, can be
capitalism dying, can be
all, see, agggggeeeeooooo. aggrggrrgeeeoouuuu. full full full can be
empty too.
nightfall by water
round moon over slums
shit in a dropper
soft face under fingertips trembling
can be
can be
can be, trane, can be, trane, because of trane, because
world world world world
can be
sean ocasey in ireland
can be, lu hsun in china
can be,
  brecht wailing
      gorky riffing
            langston hughes steaming
                        can be
                      trane
                    bird's main man
                  can be
         big maybelle can be
      workout workout workout
            expression
            ogunde
            afroblue can be
all of it meaning, essence revelation, everything together, wailing in unison
                  a terrible
wholeness.

— Amiri Baraka

AMUS MOR

"The Ginawa" Woodcut by Michael Kelly Williams, 1983

The Coming of John

(the evening and the morning are the first day)

it is friday
the eagle has flown
4 years before the real god Allah shows
before we know the happenings
we eat the devils peck
mondays hotlinks with porkenbeans
hear "newk" on dig and "bags" on moonray
see desolation in the dark between the buildings
our front view is bricks of the adjacent kitchenette

Pat riffs in a babyfied key
slips on the green knit suit
with the silver buckle at the belly
and we slide out into that wintertime
the last lights of day
with an uncanny clarity for chi town
the shafts behind the clouds popping them open
and the rust on the el grids
clashing and blending strangely
against the rays like hip black art
heaven about to show itself
above the ghetto holiday shoppers
the 1954 brand fragments of people on the walks
Hadacol on her way north
after officer driseldorf has stomped her on the street
and crushed her finger on a golden ring

the hipster in the tivoli eat shop
deals single joints after the commotion
dusk baring his first meal
with us streaming and talking about the guns
getting so mad and so frantic we sweat
get on to cool
go on home
make love and nod
then it is the new year
and the guns are going off across the alley

10 days or so hes still "on this end"
only Edwardo Harris knowing his name
John Coltrane (as he was called then)
in a big hat
gouster pleated pants and all
before metamorphosis miles plugs cotton in his ears
and philadelphia thunders in babylon

MOR

a shake dancer follows the set
and it seems a whole sea of black faces are out on "six trey"
a holy nation peeping and poor
behind the red oblong bulb of a highlife sign

Ohnedaruth the mystic has already blown and hypnotized us —
making us realize right then
THAT WE ARE LIVING IN THE BIBLE (HOLY KORAN, CABALA)

the konateski girl sets there frozen
shes followed her lifelong scent of judea
from the rich north shore township
all the way into the crown propellar lounge
into a blessed tenors bell
while we go "off into space"
peeping the dream of the old ladies of nipon
dragging the gunny sacks of brown smack across the dead battlefields
chanting "fun amelikaan" "fun amelikaan" "fun joe"
And of course the bard says (from the corner of his mouth)
"Aw right na iss a party, ya dig that. Miles come in an be doin
alla right things. Ya understand! Takes the hord'overs from the
lazy susan with so much finesse, en be so correct when he be talk-
in to them big fine socialite hos. Understand. They be sayin
'Oh Miles' ya understand. En mah man leave the door open. Nah
here come Trane. He wrong from the get go. Ya understand.
Reach his hand down in the tray, say 'gemme one of them little
samaches'. He done pushed the mop out the way, en grabbed the
johnny walker red, way from one ah them ivy league lames. Un-
derstand! See en Miles he brought the man in there for that.
They working together. Understand. He his man. Yall been hearin
all of us. Jim! them intellectuals, all of um talk-
ing about the new niggro. There he is right there. What he try-
ing ta tell yall with his horn, is that yall can't expect to
get nowhere bein what the gray call intelligent. If yall expect
to get somewhere in america, you gotta start bustin down dos an
shit, pitchin a fit, and poppin these lames upside the head.
Layin some ah these peckerwoods out across the room, is what
get you somewhere in america. If yall dont get just like me,
and start lettin yalls wigs grow wild and wooly and shit, and
starta setting all up in grays faces, yall aint goin another
futher. Cause this shit, in this here country right here is
coming down ta some shorenuff head bustin."
we stay till the lights
pull the covers off the room
showing the ragged carpet
in the great american tradition

'mayhap a manger'
make in in
fire up two thumbs and sleep
t. i. on a pallet in front of the bad window
and the hotel catches fire
and lobbys all smoking
the few steel workers with their helmets
the several a d c families
the pimps, the hustlers and the chippies
are all milling around out of it
when the "konat girl" turns up in smoke
in just leotards and a mouton coat
now shes took the pressing iron to her slavic hair
(that morning is the second day)
A Love Supreme takes me in

i stretch my hands open to a sun of morning
and breezes are light that i encounter
in my handclasps with wind

your softness take me in
like a saharian morning taught it
an i hear all that ALLAH says
when i feel the universe about the miracle you are
there is the om of a morning sky
a herb tea and vegetable magic breakfast
you serve me
zodiac sister of the suns house

there are silks within the winds of autumn
and i do not feel the stench of close buildings
alive like smog
sometimes a blare of noon
enthralls me in a mystique
a heat of atoms love
and i am myself a 6 footfire
a dynamo of afro-energy

there are gulls about the lake
and the sky like a big hip hat
guides them in compassed flight
then there is the small music
of these wise ghetto children
a symphony of innuendos on the street

we walk down six tray
down the line the day is endless
under the shadows of the el it triggers us
with the forces of the lions star
I AM — this love
lady a carbon copy of it
and somewhere over flat rooftops a moon is
so get it fire baby
our fluids will be celestial markings
cosmic clouds fluffed like creation

night will never harm you with its changes
were tuned into this purity of blackness
the gigantic spawn above just a part of it
that we must teach a nation
graces the lights of earth
and i pray while in your embrace
in this house

with the lion our protector
to keep the fruits above we bathe in

A Love Supreme. . . . .

AWAKENING

we ate breakfast

with ohnedaruth the mystic

(when he was called john coltrane)

took him from the sissy pimps bar
still with shouters in the isle

after the lights on set

dug him look up at the death room
in the strand hotel
the red marquee staining the perpetual dirt of the window facing six tray,

rode with him in his script blue chevie wagon

pass the fake gothic architecture glowing

incomplete in the nocturn of chalk and deceit

he was thinking of his death room

the prayers it took getting rid of

bad jones'/ plus a black mans paternity case set up

in a flick colorless chicago court room

the jaspers sister cracking their sides

. . . .

evil in white

everyday the nurse threw little joe out morphine caps

. . . .

. . . . it was the end of naima

that most beautiful melody . . . .

a dusty red crescent over the bell tower

and us fool enough to riff the head

Dedaaa daa daaaa dee daaaa daaaa daaa daaaaaa

in the strangers madson park basement

with the mirrors helping the color explode

islamic feeling that is time to us/heaven to come
Allah everpresent/effervescent . . . . . .

we ate our last piece of pork bacon

heard ke ra give us the run down on the evil

it definitely projected in the western world.

it was autumn 1961 . . . . . .

and john coltrane went to sleep

in the butterfly chair at the front of the room

under the color eruption caton had crucified himself on

with a trumpets bell stuck thru his head

with shango puts on african brass
the poet takes his cue

and john coltrane awakes

showing us the way to listen to his music . . really

his head stiff/his round eyes freezing to the horns planetary trip

but he had to nod

only to awake again

to a half hour dialogue

onedaduruth the mystic awoke smiling
to the term 'black power structure'
and the waving of the New West Coast magazine

MOR

GREGORY POWELL

Hymn to a Lovebird

Charlie Parker.

(for Charlie Parker)

what is this
love, this cancerous
passion searing and blooming
into hot house melodies lilting
out scag screams. this man, this
energy, weaver of dreams into air blown
tapestries/ dizzy sounds surging from
needle perforated limbs, his hurt soul
shredded by white powdered shadows
of fanged monkeys, singing the blues
in crimson sax-tongue lamentations
of chained bones
swirling in sounds
so sweet
so sweet
flame-flowers dance
on winds riffing his
ritual of dying pleas

I Sing to You of Cool

I am
the morning sun
and evening star
fire
under your pan/light
of your bulb

I am Cool

personification of
slick
embodiment of
suave/deified dean
of cut-back and clean

I am thunder
of your storm
lightning of
your flash
I am so Cool
even I aint
good enough for me

I am what you need
ever hoped for
best you can get
a scandal in annals of
your most erotic want
answer to your desire
Coolness to quench
your every trembling fire
thrusting love to fill
your
thigh twitching thirst

I'll take you
farther than
you ever been
fast or slow
fry or simmer
I'll get you
cooked
and your heat scents
will rise in
heights of my nights

your moans will sing
frenzied praises to
my phallic dance/in
orgasmic trance
your tears will thank me
for a job
well done

POWELL

I am the push
of your every pull/the
probing tongue
of your every kiss/the
sweet vibes of
your every twitch/the erupting
warmth of
your every bliss

I am
sho nuff
Cool

a Love monopolizer
a nectar-fine articulation of
your silent yearning/a
daily supplement
for a rapturous
deficiency/ a tongue
flicking speech to your
every ecstasy/ an
impressionistic masterpiece
embracing empty canvas of
your carnal
craving

I am Cool
too Cool
funky frigid and chilly
smooth

everything you need
anything you could
want
your
mind thriller/your
wheeler dealer
your
cup filler

I am Cool
the rising sun
of your morning and
the stars that spice
your deepest
night

Broken Legacy

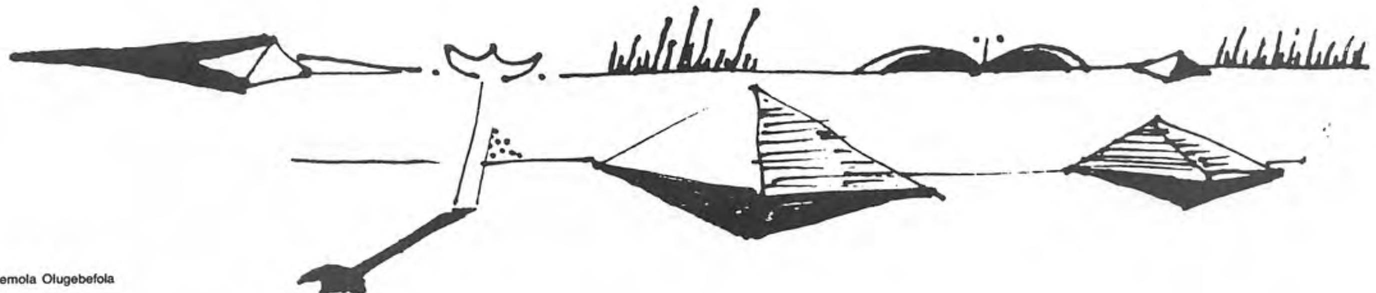
Do the bruised brass wailing
exclamation scar of history
suffocating in
bleak shadows of
southern crosses
burning/fall futilely
on ears of the brain plugged
deaf/Do the hellified
harsh sharp
horn-shouting preachments
sustain chant sermons to
empty pews/Do
anyone
still
listen
to John
Coltrane
laying
dead and buried/sax
by his side crying
blues of our blindness/shedding
sound tears dripping from veins
like dry seeds suffering sterility/infested
with infertility/downtrodden
with stone cold stark
rejection
Do anybody
hear
vibrating veins ringing
life-blood harmonies of
Africa singing Meditations
to a sacred Crescent launching
an Ascension into
Live-song Impressions of

A Love Supreme

A Love Supreme

A Love Supreme

continued on next page



By Ademola Olugebefola

Do anybody
remember the song that
birthed amid avant garde labor
screams
out the belly of
the sax/amid
stuttering screams stretching
long
long
through weary years
home
i remember
the song that
sweetly summoned blood-flow
in tidal waves
dousing
fear flames profane
of steel chi southside
burning crosses
to smoldering steam swept
by wind sweeping sounds
i remember the
song
that bade me dance
my manhood trampling
sissyfied parasitic fears into
freedom tones and
clenched fist rhythms
i remember the song/soaring
winged Ballads/searing Invo-
cations harmonically
jamming in Afro-Blue
Expressions of

A Love Supreme

A Love Supreme

A Love Supreme

Do anyone
remember the song that
blew wind waves when we
could not breathe/the song that
serenaded the nightmare with
life vibrations
Do anyone remember the
Song/the sensuous flower
that strains to bloom/the
violent brass steel movement
bursting anthems
to our survival/the
deified ritualistic
incantation omnisonic
solar-note solo strutting
a fiery eternity

Do anyone
hear with heart-ears
the Song that scrawls
the signiture of life
Do anyone
still
listen
to John
Coltrane

Do anyone
still
remember
the Song

Baptism

the song, naked
chants of broken saints
commences resurrection in
rites of dance

distant sound streams circulate
lynched cries, through saxophone
oracles, into bloodstreams
of prophets (or thieves, extracting
visions from footstomp shouts and
winged wails

i hear this song.

that sirens low-down blues
moaning in my midnights,
swings away invisible
executioners, and sails
jazz upon winds of dreams

until out metal bars
spread before my eyes

i sing

Disciple

i am
night child
street shadow slayer/stone
chi player
sun-down alley
vicelord

the baddest
mutherfucker who ever
walked the earth
booty stomper bitch whopper
shit dipper/well oiled
efficient ass kicker/flame spitting
blade wheeling
head peeler/cold-cool
rumble reeling
triple dealer/grave digger
bloody trigger
nigger killer

vertical hell/searing steel
bruising brick
crushing
wheel
satan angel
cry-bleeding demon king

brass knuckled
blood spiller/broken
skulled
psycho dreamer/murder
thirsting crazy
ass
festering scar

body-shell
shackled ice

encasing

fractured
soul

POWELL

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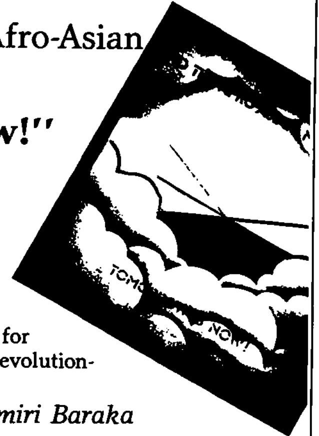

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