Wesleyan University

Department of Music

New World, New Music: Creative Music Communities in New Haven and Woodstock in the 1970s and Their Legacies

By

Sean Sonderegger

Faculty Advisor: Professor Eric Charry

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Middletown, Connecticut			April 2018
Abstract

This dissertation examines the musical experimentation of the 1970s through an examination of two scenes that coalesced during that time period, one based in the area around New Haven, CT and the other around Creative Music Studio in Woodstock, NY. Focusing on the relationship between Afro and Euro-American experimental traditions and world musics, it examines the work of composer/improvisers that participated in these scenes and the unique philosophies and musical systems that they have developed. It also explores the development of their music and musical philosophy in relationship to other scholars and artists active around them.

It goes on to follow the careers of these composer/improvisers through the present day and examines their attempts to navigate multiple art worlds and cultural milieus, eventually focusing on their work as pedagogues. Finally, it looks at the influence that this experimentation has exerted on the current generation of creative musicians and looks forward at the future of creative music and intercultural music making.
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Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not exist without the voices of the composer/improvisers who I spoke to throughout the process of writing it. I would like to thank all of the people that allowed me to interview them during this project, especially Wadada Leo Smith, Anthony Davis, Gerry Hemingway, Jay Hoggard, James Newton, Marilyn Crispell, Peter Apfelbaum, Karl Berger, Taylor Ho Bynum, James Brandon Lewis, and Michael Gregory Jackson.

I am especially grateful for the input of Pheeroan akLaff, who granted me many opportunities to speak with him about a range of subjects during the process of writing my dissertation. I also greatly appreciate the time that I was able to spend with Professor Abraham Adzenyah, learning a great deal about music, culture, and life, as well as receiving valuable information about the intercultural improvisation happening at Wesleyan and in NYC in the 1970s.

None of this would have been possible without the assistance and support of Anthony Braxton, who inspired me to start this research, and to attend Wesleyan University. His body of work as a composer speaks for itself and I continue to draw inspiration from his example. George Lewis’ scholarship, as well as the work of his many accomplished students has also been a key inspiration for my studies.

I would also like to thank my dissertation committee especially Professor Eric Charry, who spent a great deal of time helping shape my research and always challenged me to clearly articulate my ideas in the most succinct way possible. I
have to thank Mark Slobin for all of his input and I feel extremely fortunate to have studied with someone who has contributed so much to the field of ethnomusicology. I also thank Kate Galloway for all of the work that she put into helping shape my dissertation, especially coming on at such a late stage in the process. I am also grateful that I had the privilege of studying with Su Zheng, Sumarsam, Paula Matthusen, Neely Bruce, Ron Kuivila, David Behrman, and Elliot Sharp, who have all impacted me in profound ways.

I also owe a debt of gratitude to Cheryl Keyes, Steve Loza, Ali Jihad Racy, Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje, Nazir Jairazbhoy, and all of the professors at UCLA who introduced me to the discipline of ethnomusicology as an impressionable young jazz musician.

I would also like to thank all of the teachers that I’ve had over the years particularly Russ Mullen, Buddy Colette, Reginald Andrews, Katisse Buckingham, and Jason Goldman. I’m also grateful to have known and learned from all of the musicians that I “came up with” in LA, particularly Brandon Coleman, Kamasi Washington, Michael Schron, Joel O’Neill, Stephen Bruner, Robert Miller, Ronald Bruner, Jr., Lyndon Rochelle, Kharon Harrison, Matt Silberman, Sandie Castañeda, Tony Austin, Miles Mosley, Chris Gray, Isaac Smith, Ryan Porter, Mahesh Balasooriya, Zane Musa (RIP), Brandon Owens, Gerald Clayton, Brian Warfield, and the members of the Condiments.

All of the musicians that I’ve worked with in New York have also made a considerable impact on my musical worldview. I’d like to especially thank Mark Taylor, Roy Nathanson, Butch Morris, Curtis Fowlkes, Kenny Wollesen, as well as
Adam Rudolph and the rest of the Go Organic family. I’d also like to thank my collaborators in my group Magically Inclined, Kamala Sankaram, Areni Agbabian, Harvey Valdes, Greg Chudzik, Shawn Lovato, Joe Hertenstein, and Peter Valsamis.

I greatly appreciated the camaraderie of my fellow Wesleyan Graduate students, especially Nathan Friedman, Hallie Blejewski, Ellen Lueck, Cristohper Ramos Flores, Jasmine Lovell-Smith, John Welsh, Sam Dickey, Peter Blasser, Daniel Fishkin, Omar Fraire, Dave Scanlon, Jason Brogan, and Dina Macabee. I feel truly blessed to have interacted with such brilliant and creative people during the last 5 years. I also greatly benefitted in many ways from conversations with my fellow jazz studies people Alex W. Rodriguez, Charles Sharp, and Jeff Schwartz during this period.

I would also like to acknowledge the emotional support of my parents, Joe and Connie Sonderegger, and my wife Colette and son Lucas without whom I wouldn’t have been able to complete this dissertation.
Introduction

In the 1990s, as a teenager, growing up in Los Angeles, I was a voracious listener, immersing myself in a wide variety of jazz and creative music. I picked up many used LPs on the Gramavision label from Record Surplus in West L.A., and the names Jay Hoggard and Pheeroan akLaff were familiar ones to me from their work with James Newton and Anthony Davis. Like many of the subjects of this dissertation, I was obsessed with finding out all I could about jazz and creative music. This compulsion took the form of collecting recordings, reading about musicians as well as talking to and performing with masters of the tradition, in my case, Billy Higgins and Harold Land. This insatiable quest to learn more about the music led me to Wesleyan University, to which I made the decision to apply to upon meeting Anthony Braxton in 2011 after a performance of his ensemble at Roulette in Brooklyn.

As a graduate student at Wesleyan University, I began to study with Hoggard and akLaff and engage in conversations outside of class. I started to learn about the vibrant musical community that they were a part of in New Haven, Connecticut in the 1970s. The more that I began to talk with the musicians who I was studying with at Wesleyan and performing with in New York, I began to realize the historical importance of the Creative Music Studio (CMS), in Woodstock, New York, and the New Haven scenes to many of the musical situations in which I was participating, as well as to the larger history of jazz and creative music.
The more that I spoke with these communities of musicians I began to recognize the importance of their musical formation in the 1970s, a period during which they had access to an ever-expanding source of musical influences. From increased live and recorded access to traditional music from around the world, to newly-created popular forms — particularly emanating from parts of the African-diaspora — these musicians had a wealth of material available to them that simply did not exist a generation prior. Before the mid-1980s, without what Anthony Braxton describes as “the jazz industrial complex” policing them, these musicians incorporated diverse influences into fascinating original concepts that were celebrated by the critical establishment.

In their creative music education, and eclecticism, I saw important parallels to my own formation, and the formation of many of my friends and musical associates. My undergraduate education at UCLA and exposure to many distinct world traditions was very influential to my own music making. At the same time that I am writing this dissertation, my friend Kamasi Washington, with whom I grew up and attended UCLA — a product of the same musical education — launched from relative obscurity to the new face of jazz in 2015 with his debut recording The Epic.

This dissertation focuses on two distinct groups of composer/improvisers in the 1970s and 80s. The first group came in contact with one another through their residence in New Haven and other parts of Central Connecticut. Many of these improvisers had some degree of association with Yale University and Wesleyan University and many worked closely with Leo Smith. The second group
would come together through the Creative Music Studio, a school started in Woodstock, NY. The school was established to teach African American improvised, experimental European American, and a wide variety of world musics. Founded by Ornette Coleman, Karl Berger, and his partner Ingrid Sertso, CMS became a collaborative effort of, and meeting place for a multiplicity of collectives and scenes in and around the area. These included musicians associated with the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (Chicago), Black Artists Group (St. Louis), Union of God’s Musicians and Artists Ascension (Los Angeles), as well as musicians from different world, experimental, and new music traditions. Importantly, CMS focused on the merging of the different musical traditions that were taught there. The musicians of the New Haven and CMS scenes were the first generation to emerge after the original members of the 1960s collectives. For a timeline of the emergence of these 1970s-generation artists as leaders, along with many important artists associated with the 1960s collectives see Table 1.
Table 1: First Recordings of AACM, CMS, JCOA, New Haven Musicians as Leaders

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<th>Artist</th>
<th>Album</th>
<th>Year Recorded</th>
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<td>NTU Point From Which Creation Begins</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>BAG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julius Hemphill</td>
<td>Dogon A.D.</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>BAG</td>
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<td>Air</td>
<td>Air Song</td>
<td>1975</td>
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<td>Hamiet Bluiett</td>
<td>Endangered Species</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>BAG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Lewis</td>
<td>The Solo Trombone Record</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>NH/AACM</td>
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<td>Michael Gregory Jackson</td>
<td>Clarity</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>New Haven</td>
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<td>James Newton</td>
<td>Flute Music</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>UGMAA</td>
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<td>Anthony Davis</td>
<td>Past Lives</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>New Haven</td>
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<td>Gerry Hemingway</td>
<td>Kwambe</td>
<td>1978</td>
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Because many of these meetings took place over 40 years ago, I have the benefit of hindsight to explore the connections that musicians of these groups have created and maintained over the years. For many of the artists that I
interviewed, this formative period remains vitally important. Gerry Hemingway, one of the subjects of this dissertation, is working on an upcoming reunion in New Haven, and at the time of this writing is currently having many of his 1970s personal recordings digitized for possible release. Karl Berger is also in the process of having all of the CMS concerts catalogued and digitized at Columbia University, a project which began in 2008 (Ratliff 2008). These two scenes, whose time periods encompass roughly 1969-1978 in the case of New Haven, and 1973-1984 in the case of the CMS, are beginning to be revisited and recognized for their importance.

The CMS and New Haven scenes both share many of the same aesthetic and philosophical interests. They also share the quality of similar distance from and proximity to New York City, widely regarded as the capital of jazz and experimental musics. Both Leo Smith and Karl Berger were introduced to New Haven and Woodstock, respectively, through saxophonist and composer Marion Brown, who was a graduate student at Wesleyan from 1974-76 (Smith interviewed by Bynum 2011a, Berger interview 2014).

**Literature Review**

The 1970s as a whole are relatively neglected as an era in Jazz Studies. However, there are a few excellent recent monographs and dissertations that focus on this time period, particularly Michael Heller’s *Loft Jazz: Improvising New York in the 1970s* (2016), and Kevin Fellesz’ *Birds of Fire* (2011), whose concept of “fusioning” to describe the creation of hybrid musical forms has been
influential on my own thinking.

Bob Gluck’s *You’ll Know When You Get There* (2012), examining the music of Herbie Hancock’s early 1970s Mwandishi ensemble, and *The Lost Quintet and Other Revolutionary Ensembles* (2016) also show the connections between the many strands of musical experimentation taking place during this period. The latter, which examines the connections among Miles Davis’ electric period, Anthony Braxton, Leroy Jenkins and the loft scene begins to shed light on an interconnected network of musicians, whose relationship has been previously neglected in jazz scholarship.

The work of Heller and Gluck has added considerably to the understanding of the downtown NYC loft scene in the 1970s. Heller characterizes the downtown NYC loft scene, writing:

> Energy approaches continued to play an important role in New York as the lofts rose to prominence...Cooper-Moore conveyed the style of his band Apogee by saying, ‘At that time it was just-BLOW. Blow until you stop blowing...Who ever is in the audience, they [either] get it or they don’t get it’ (2016:94)

However, there has been little scholarship investigating musicians who operated on the periphery of NYC during this period, and their relationship to this scene. *Music Universe, Music Mind* (1996) and *All Kinds of Time* (2016), both by CMS participant Robert Sweet, remain important documents relating to the musical experimentation of the 1970s. They include background information about the founding and operation of the CMS, as well as information about CMS’ rebirth in 2013 and Karl Berger’s Improvisers Orchestra. Sweet’s books, while comprehensive in certain regards, do not focus in great depth on the connections
between CMS and other contemporaneous developments in creative music and the larger world of American experimental music.

In addition to these books, the Vol.1, 2010 edition of the journal *Jazz Perspectives* was dedicated to “Rethinking Jazz Through the 1970s.” In the introduction, Eric Porter writes that in many jazz histories: “The decade is...viewed as a period defined more by its aesthetic failures than by its successes or simply as a moment when ‘nothing was happening’ in the music” (Porter 2010:2). Reviewing this collection he is hopeful that “Taken together, the essays and reviews of this issue also suggest how serious analyses of artists active during the 1970s may enable new approaches to jazz studies subjects across the decades. In particular, the essays accomplish this by engaging head on some of the musical and extra-musical elements—commodity status, experimentalism, a surplus of identity, etc.—that have often been emphasized by critics of the era” (ibid:3).

The first article in the collection is an examination of Miles Davis’ early electric period and the many factors that influenced the commercial viability of his work during this era. Ostensibly, in order to counter the narrative that many commentators have advanced--that Davis turned to fusion primarily for commercial purposes1--Jeremy Smith suggests that, “the artist’s and the record label’s efforts to sell Davis’s music were part of broader agendas—an aesthetic and cultural nationalist one on Davis’s part, a more general attempt to influence the market on Columbia’s—and...such goals were at times dependent upon, and

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1 Smith cites Stanley Crouch, “Play the Right Thing,” *The New Republic*, February 12, 1990: 30–37, (an article whose subhead reads “Miles Davis, the most brilliant sellout in the history of jazz”) among others.
at other times in conflict with, one another” (J. Smith 2010:8). Smith also connects Davis’ music to the politics of black music in the early 1970s, writing that “Davis’s embrace of the politicized language of ‘blackness’ in describing his music, together with his attempts to reach African American listeners and his general advocacy for economic empowerment for African Americans in the music business, collectively expressed Black Arts and cultural nationalist impulses” (ibid:23).

Kevin Fellesz’s article explores Toshiko Akiyoshi’s incorporation of traditional Japanese music into her big band compositions, and investigates “both how Akiyoshi’s ‘rootless’ creative aesthetic was a result of her musical experiences, and how this personal history reinforced her nascent mistrust of any presumptive links between authentic jazz and the contentious categories of race, gender, and nationality” (Fellesz 2010:35).

Finally, Andrew Raffo Dewar’s article considers the “ontology” of Bill Dixon’s performance of his piece “Webern,” realized through a complex interaction of technologically-mediated composition and improvisation. Dewar also situates the study within the racial politics of the era, writing that, in his study, Bill Dixon’s piece “‘Webern’ is in turn situated as a product of Dixon’s thinking about composition and improvisation in a general sense, as an acknowledgement of the Viennese composer Anton Webern’s influence, as a negotiation of the complex racial and cultural politics of the jazz world during the 1960s and 1970s, and as an outcome of the geographical and physical conditions under which this work was produced.” (Dewar 2010:63)
As Porter suggests, all three of these articles deal with themes that would define the musical experimentation of the 1970s. Smith deals with creative musicians’ increased engagement with black popular music, musical commerce and new definitions of what constituted “black” music, while Fellesz’s article deals with identity, musical hybridity, and cross-cultural composition. Dewar addresses the increasingly blurred boundaries of composition and improvisation that creative musicians continued to explore in increasingly complex ways during this period. Additionally, they situate these artists and their experimentation within the cultural politics of the 1970s.

This dissertation seeks to broaden the scope of relatively recent research that has been performed on music collectives, including work on Los Angeles collective the Union of Gods Musicians and Artist’s Ascension (UGMAA) by Steven Isoardi in *Songs of the Unsung* (w. Horace Tapscott: 2001), and *The Dark Tree* (2007), and St. Louis’ Black Artists Group (BAG) by Benjamin Looker in *The Point at Which Creation Begins* (2004).

George’s Lewis’ *A Power Stronger Than Itself* (2008), focused on Chicago’s Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, is of particular influence on my own work. Lewis’ mixture of ethnography, in the form of a wealth of extensive interviews, and archival research of diverse contemporaneous articles on his subjects provided me with a template for my own work. Lewis addresses the work of AACM artists as pedagogues, community members, and artists, following the multiple trajectories that the careers of artists associated with the organization have followed. Lewis explores the activities of the AACM in
New York beginning in the 1970s and the influence of these artists on and their connection to jazz and classical art worlds. Lewis writes that,

Over more than forty years of work, the composite output of AACM members has explored a wide range of methodologies, processes, and media. AACM musicians developed new and influential ideas about timbre, sound, collectivity, extended technique and instrumentation, performance practice, intermedia, the relationship of improvisation to composition, form, scores, computer music technologies, invented acoustic instruments, installations, and kinetic sculptures. (2008:ix)

In addition to their wide-ranging approach to musical innovation Lewis examines how “the collective developed strategies for individual and collective self-production and promotion that both reframed the artist/business relationship and challenged racialized limitations on venues and infrastructure” (ibid.).

Lewis examines the history of the organization, from the early musical development of many of the first wave members to the state of the collective at the time of the book’s writing. He paints a comprehensive picture of the organization and the cultural context that they developed in and navigated as mature artists. Somewhat surprisingly, given his background as a masterful composer and improviser, Lewis’ description of the actual music created by these artists is given a background role to his historiography and focus on the cultural dynamics surrounding the music.

Looker’s *Point at Which Creation Begins* examines the history of the Black Artists Group in depth, including the St. Louis environs that led to their formation. Looker examines the particularity of the St. Louis scene, and seeks to contribute to a discourse around the Black Arts Movement that is usually focused
on the artistic activities of New York and Los Angeles. Looker writes, “Although the critics gaze has focused mostly on the coasts, a richer, more complex, and more problematic vision of the Black Arts Movement emerges when regional cooperatives such as BAG are brought back into light” (xxii).

Looker examines the ways in which BAG, cut off from the white-dominated commercial recording industry not only by aesthetic and political considerations but also by geography, were forced to practice self-determination in order to create a vibrant scene. Many of the musicians active in the Black Artists Group would engage in the same kinds of DIY activities that Smith and other members of the AACM were engaged in, including founding record labels, like Julius Hemphill’s Mbari records. Looker also stresses the importance of the interdisciplinary nature of the Black Artists Group, writing: “Unlike many other artistic collectives during the period, BAG was fundamentally committed to a collaborative interweaving of the members diverse artistic mediums” (ibid.).

Looker also examines the role of these musicians as teachers exploring the work of the interdisciplinary program that they established in the community, teaching an Afrocentric curriculum for which the AACM school “formed a strong blueprint” (Looker 2004:74). He also explores the engagement of the collective with the larger St. Louis arts community, writing “in allying with such multiracial progressive groups as the Human Arts Association, they acted out a more integrationist ideology than that of many radical arts groups elsewhere, thereby insisting upon the universality of their aesthetic vision” (ibid. xxiii).

*The Dark Tree*, which focuses on UGMAA, and Horace Tapscott, in
particular, examines the relationship between Tapscott, his Pan Afrikan Peoples Arkestra and the larger South Los Angeles community. Isoardi’s account is exhaustive in many respects, detailing Tapscott’s musical history and engagement with the community, and tying such communal engagement to traditional West African practices and African American culture during slavery and segregation (Isoardi 2006:3-5, 8-12). Isoardi also mentions the wide range of artistic activity that was percolating in Watts after the 1965 rebellion, as well as UGMAA’s engagement with radical politics and the UCLA filmmakers sometimes referred to as the “L.A. Rebellion.” Isoardi, through a plethora of interviews with participants, paints a rich picture of the history of UGMAA, and the Black Arts Movement in Los Angeles more generally. However, there is very little description and analysis of UGMAA’s musical aesthetic or their specific contributions to African American musical experimentalism.

As this dissertation seeks to contribute to the growing field of studies on African American experimentalism, Eric Porter’s focus on creative musicians as philosophers and pedagogues in What is This Thing Called Jazz?, (2002) is an important template. In addition to working with some of the same material as Porter, I also had the privilege of speaking to some of Porter’s subjects, Wadada Leo Smith and Anthony Braxton in particular, as well as their students. This ethnographic approach augments Porter’s work adding to a contemporary understanding of these artists’ 1970s statements. Ian Anderson’s This is Our Music (2007) addresses the cultural impact of the jazz avant-garde, creative musicians in academia (162), and the relationship of creative music to European
and Euro-American experimentalism (113), themes which I also touch on in this dissertation.

As I examine Anthony Braxton’s contributions to pedagogy as a professor and his engagement with CMS during his Woodstock years, I hope to contribute to a growing body of literature studying Braxton’s music. These include Ronald Radano’s *New Musical Figurations* (1993), Graham Lock’s *Forces in Motion*, and Michael Heffley’s *The Music of Anthony Braxton* (1996), which all take different approaches to analyzing Braxton’s musical and cultural importance. Adam Tinkle’s dissertation “The Expanding Universal: Participation and Pedagogy in Experimental Music” (2015), which examines Braxton’s pedagogy, particularly during his time at CMS, was also an influence on my overall project.

In Chapter 3, I examine the influence of Ornette Coleman and Don Cherry on the CMS, particularly Coleman’s “harmolodic” concept/philosophy. Some important writings that have influenced my thinking about Coleman’s music have been A.B. Spellman’s *Black Music: Four Lives* (originally published as *Four Lives in the Bebop Business* (1967)) and John Litweiler’s *A Harmolodic Life* (1992). The recent *Free Jazz, Harmolodics, and Ornette Coleman* (2017) contains Stephen Rush’s analysis of Coleman’s spoken and musical statements. It presents a comprehensive assessment of how Coleman’s concept of harmolodics has manifested itself in the improvisation of Coleman, and in the wide variety of musicians influenced by his music. Alex W. Rodriguez’s article “Harmolodic Pedagogy and the Challenge of Omni-Musicality” (2016) helps place Ornette’s music and philosophy in a larger context, including relating it to Mantle Hood’s
concept of bi-musicality. Adding to this body of literature, I address Coleman's harmolodic philosophy and its impact on the non-hierarchical nature of CMS as well as its influence on the music of Don Cherry and, following Lewis (2004a:82), suggest that Cherry and his own unique musical philosophies were also an important influence on the overall direction of the CMS.

Another important aim of this study is to look at the effect of this period on the eventual formation of what has been described, following the subtitle of *Uptown Conversation* (2004), as “the new jazz studies.” Beginning with the studies of ethnomusicologists with backgrounds in jazz, it has come to encompass a wide variety of approaches to jazz, creative music, and improvisation informed by a range of disciplinary and philosophical perspectives.

Two important books that represent the ethnographic approach of the initial wave of the new jazz studies are Paul Berliner’s *Thinking in Jazz* (1994), and Ingrid Monson’s *Saying Somethin’* (1996). Of course, these books were also praised for their innovative approaches in the field of ethnomusicology. This new approach would continue with a series of influential collections of writings. *Uptown Conversation* (2004), a collection emerging out of Columbia’s Jazz Study Group, is “strongly influenced by a variety of developments in the academy: by African American studies, cultural studies, literary studies, the new musicology, and by insights of poststructuralism” (O’Meally 2004:6).

Other excellent collections of writing representing this increasingly interdisciplinary movement are compiled in *The Other Side of Nowhere* (2004), edited by Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble, *People Get Ready* (2013) edited by
Heble and Rob Wallace, the *Fierce Urgency of Now* (2015), also edited by Fischlin and Heble (along with George Lipsitz) as well as *Negotiated Moments* (2016), edited by Gillian Siddall and Ellen Waterman.

Critical to the continuation of this project is scholar/composer/improviser George Lewis. Lewis (interview with Soltes 1997:121-128) has spoken at length about his holistic personal approach to scholarship as well as the genesis of the formation of a particular philosophical outlook in the Critical Studies and Experimental Practices program under his tenure at UCSD. The program was created to address the many “hybrid practices” (G. Lewis interviewed by Soltes 1997:123) of musician/scholars whose research interests fell outside of the realm of any particular one discipline (or within the realm of many). Lewis recalls:

> scholarship is related to life experience....I got involved in writing through being a professor at UCSD, and realizing that a lot of students coming through our interdisciplinary program really needed a field in which they could talk about their concerns...They’re seriously confronting cultural issues of race, gender and so on. There didn’t seem to be a place within traditional music scholarship to address that. (G. Lewis in Shoemaker 2001)

A few of the dissertations that were conducted under Lewis and Anthony Davis’ guidance at UCSD include Jason Stanyek’s “Diasporic Improvisation and the Articulation of Intercultural Music” (2004), Michael Dessen’s “Decolonizing Art Music” (2003), which looks at the racial coding of a range of experimentalist practices, and Jason Robinson’s “Improvising California” (2005), which provides an important template for looking at regional expressions of creative improvised music.
The work of Benjamin Piekut, especially *Experimentalism Otherwise*, has been influential to my overall project. Piekut, examining the constructed narratives around American experimentalism writes: “the ‘tradition’ wasn’t something that magically coalesced around shared qualities of indeterminacy and rugged individualism. It was a network, arranged and fabricated through the hard work of composers, critics, scholars, performers and a host of other elements” (2011:19). I share Piekut’s interest in deconstructing dominant narratives of experimentalism, and his interest in looking at the unexplored connections between different experimental communities is also reflected in this dissertation.

John Zorn’s *Arcana* series features collections of writings by musicians on a variety of topics that are relevant to this dissertation. Widely variable in their form and content, ranging from poetry to more scholarly offerings with footnotes and citations, they offer a window into the philosophy, aesthetics, and concerns of multiple generations of creative musicians active today. They also address many of the same issues as the scholars associated with the New Jazz Studies. I attempt to look at the importance of these artists’ statements, which carry on the tradition of the writing of Leo Smith, Marion Brown, Anthony Braxton, and other artists who self-published their philosophical and creative writings.

**The New Haven and Woodstock scenes**

I use the term “New Haven scene” to describe a particular group of musicians who were active in New Haven in the 1970s. Many of the musicians
who I spoke to used some variation on this, for example Gerry Hemingway spoke of a “New Haven school” of musicians, or “school of thought” (Hemingway interview 2014). Wadada Leo Smith uses the term “scene” in reference to his time in New Haven, recalling that: “we opened up this town for at least an approach to creative music when nothing was happening...And it blossomed into a nice little scene” (Smith interviewed by Bynum 2011b: 8). Critic Gene Santoro (2016) calls this period “The New Haven Renaissance,” a term that I have not encountered elsewhere. In a 2000 essay, George Lewis writes about “The New Haven Scene” and “The Woodstock Scene,” without theorizing the applicability of the term to either group of artists (2000:85,91). The term “scene,” as Michael Dessen points out, is not a particularly well-defined one.

In comparison to institutionalized collectives, then, where membership is more clearly defined and regulated, scenes are inherently messy and fluid. They shift constantly and quickly, they overlap with one another, they may draw upon multiple traditions, and they are highly subjective since there is no agreed-upon process for membership. (2003:21)

Will Straw, one of the first scholars to attempt a concrete definition, defines a scene as, “that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization” (Straw 1991:373). Travis Jackson theorizes the importance of the scene in jazz and creative music, writing:

Either way, studying scenes allows a researcher to place various relations between groups and their negotiation of space and time at the center of inquiry and to move beyond the oppositions between musicians and
various others. Moreover, the frequent use of the term scene by jazz musicians and critics gives it an emic valence and specificity missing from other formulations. (Jackson 2012:55)

As Jackson and Dessen suggest, applied informally, the term “scene” is one that is widely accepted in the world of jazz and creative music for a group of musicians who perform together and cultivate a distinct aesthetic. Furthermore, Straw’s theorization of a scene containing “a range of musical processes coexist[ing]” with “widely varying trajectories of...cross-fertilization” is particularly apt to describe both of these musical communities that were defined by their hybridity and focus on intercultural collaboration.

This cohort of musicians, in many cases, spent close to a decade together in New Haven, formed unique approaches to composition and improvisation, and created ties that last until the present. The CMS, because of its official designation as a school, is in some ways a more coherent entity. However, because many of its participants (students, performers, and guiding artists) only spent one 4 to 6-week term there, participants had wildly divergent experiences with, and exposure to, Woodstock and the school itself.

“Creative Music”

Central to this dissertation is the idea of “creative music,” an appellation that many of the artists profiled in this study continue to use to describe their music. The term, which entered the musical lexicon in the 1960s through its use by members of the AACM, has possible origins that date to the 1930s (Sonderegger 2014:3). Leo Smith, who was a mentor to many of the younger
musicians in New Haven, was a major proponent of the use of the locution. In 1975 Smith would start the Creative Music Improvisers Forum with Wes Brown, Bobby Naughton, and Gerry Hemingway (Hemingway interview 2014).

Karl Berger, who was responsible for naming Creative Music Studio, claims to have first heard the terminology from Smith (Berger interview 2014). Creative music is a term that operates on multiple levels. Originally, it was meant to highlight the centrality of creativity in African American improvised music (and African American culture more generally), and to differentiate it from European and Euro-American classical ideas of interpreting notation (Smith 1973). It also was a kind of self-naming that rejected what George Lewis refers to as “the putative jazz label” (2004a:67), a label which many African American artists began to feel was imposed from the outside and limited their opportunities to cross over into other art worlds (G. Lewis 2008). For Berger and others it also signified a music that wasn’t tied to traditional generic markers (Sweet 1996).

The term “creative music” has begun to enter academic discourse, particularly through early and mid 2000s scholarship emanating from UCSD’s Interdisciplinary Studies program under the leadership of Lewis. While Radano, Porter, and other scholars studying members of the AACM address the term, they do not adopt it in their own writing to refer to the music. Michael Dessen cites Sarita Gregory’s use (1995) as one of the first uses of the term in a scholarly context (2003:40).

An important aspect of creative music practice for many artists in the 1970s and 80s was an engagement with popular musics. Although this
phenomenon has been amply explored in relation to fusion, there is very little scholarship on the intersections between the avant-garde and popular musics during this time period. Although Lewis (2008) speaks to the diversity of the musics that the AACM performed, his focus is primarily on exploring the music with a focus on experimentalism.

Even though they never recorded, Déjà Vu was a group that played an eclectic mix of black popular music for an enthusiastic, local, working-class audience in New Haven (akLaff interview 2014, Hoggard interview 2014). Playing in the group was a formative experience in the musical careers of Dwight Andrews, Jay Hoggard and Pheeroan akLaff, three members of the New Haven cohort (akLaff interview 2014). It was after seeing Andrews and akLaff in this context that Leo Smith would eventually enlist them both to work with his ensemble. The 1970s was a period during which jazz and creative music was regularly presented at the same events and venues as more popular musics, and saw increased interpenetration between musical worlds. Greg Tate writes that:

Equally peculiar to this era was a sense of a unified black community that didn’t require the worlds of black jazz and black pop to play by the rules of intracultural segregation that prevail today. (2013:219)

The sound of Déjà Vu would become a point of reference for later recordings of akLaff and Hoggard, as well as some 1980s recordings by BAG member and Leo Smith collaborator Oliver Lake, several of which akLaff performs (and sings) on

2 A few examples of works of creative musicians associated with the 1960s collectives incorporating influences from Afro-diasporic popular musics include Lester Bowie’s Brass Fantasy records, Henry Threadgill’s use of diasporic popular dance rhythms with his Sextett and Very Very Circus groups, and Wadada Leo Smith’s reggae influenced mid-1980s record Rastafari. Julius Hemphill’s JAH band featured on the 1984 album Georgia Blue is another important example.
(one of them, Jump Up was produced by Hoggard).

The 1970s and 80s were also a fertile time for African American composers in the tradition of what Anthony Braxton describes in his *Triaxium* writings as “black notated music” (1985 Vol. 3:24), which he uses to refer to concert music written by African American composers. At the same time that composers associated with jazz and creative music were beginning to write more thoroughly notated ambitious works, composers such as Olly Wilson, Talib Rasul Hakim, and others were looking at ways to incorporate improvisation as well as African and diasporic influences into their concert music.

This dissertation also looks at the continued effort of creative musicians to bring improvisation and other features of Afro-diasporic musics into the Western orchestra. I examine the work of Anthony Davis, George Lewis, James Newton, Henry Threadgill, and other composers who have spent their careers attempting to incorporate improvisation and an expansive definition of black music into notated art music. Drawing on W.E.B DuBois’ concept of double consciousness, Olly Wilson writes:

The concept of duality is at the core of understanding the unique aesthetic qualities that inform the black composer, particularly the composer who works partially or completely within a written musical tradition. This artist reflects a special reality, a reality that results from an understanding of the musical values of the black musical tradition, that is, the music with ‘the veil,’ and, at the same time, is also conversant with the musical practices clearly extrinsic to that veil—the Euro-American, literate musical tradition. (1985:30)

Through the use of their own groups within the context of larger
traditional orchestras and chamber groups, and the use of improvisation within highly notated works, many of these composers blur the lines between music that is within and outside of the “veil” of black musical tradition.

**The Loft Scene**

During the 1970s, the loft scene in lower Manhattan became the primary staging ground for the new sounds of jazz and creative music. With a history that dates back to informal Harlem rent parties in the 1920s, Heller writes that “the first performance of jazz in lofts date at least to the mid-1950s” (2017:40), pointing out the generally informal nature of these events that occurred “inside the homes of musicians, artists, or supportive fans.” (ibid.) He cites the NYC Flower District (in the upper 20s on the West Side) lofts of W. Eugene Smith (1957-1965) and East Village loft of Dan Serro (1961) as two particularly active sites for networking and experimentation (Heller 2016:41). Serro describes a scene in the early 1960s that was not unlike many participants’ experiences in the 1970s, stating: “In those days, free jazz musicians didn’t write, they just played. It was free music, period” (ibid.).

One of the earliest mentions in print of a burgeoning “loft” scene, where musicians gave concerts to public audience in loft spaces--“not just sessions but formally arranged concerts” (Jones 1967:96)--was in Amiri Baraka’s 1963 Down Beat article, “Loft and Coffee Shop Jazz.” While Baraka was somewhat ambivalent about the viability of this new movement that sought to circumvent
the traditional power dynamic of the jazz club, Bill Dixon’s (1925-2010) 1964 October Revolution, one year later, would show the jazz world that this movement was a force to be reckoned with. Heller writes:

In Dixon’s hands, however, the event aimed to transcend and transform the meager surroundings into a suitable venue for serious music. It was billed as a ‘Festival of Contemporary Music,’ and one journalist even described the setting as ‘not really a café, but a small concert hall with sandwiches and coffee.’ (ibid:42)

In the 1960s, with the collapse of industry in New York, many loft spaces in industrial neighborhoods were vacant. While the lion’s share of the loft spaces featuring jazz and creative music were located in industrial areas of lower Manhattan, primarily in the neighborhood now known as Soho, there were also loft spaces in the Lower East Side and in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, including a building at 106-109 Broadway that Marion Brown and Rashied Ali moved into in 1967 (Brown 1976).

Other lofts, like Eugene Smith’s in the 1950s, were located in the area around Chelsea and the Flower District. One particularly noteworthy loft in the late 1960s was the one that Dave Liebman (b. 1946), Chick Corea (b.1941), Dave Holland (b.1946) and others lived in at 138 West 19th Street (Gluck 2016:82). The members of this loft formed the collective Free Life Communication in 1970, after consulting AACM members Leroy Jenkins (b. 1937) and Anthony Braxton for advice on forming a collective (ibid.85). Ornette Coleman’s Artist House, opened

3 Baraka (1967: 96) states that “Another manifestation of New York’s messed-up jazz scene was the beginning of loft jazz.”
4 See Piekut (2011) for a thorough discussion of Bill Dixon and the October Revolution.
in 1968 and located at 131 Prince Street, was another early loft space that predated the prime 1970s loft era. Heller writes that Coleman’s policy of letting other musicians use his space for concerts was a major influence on Rashied Ali, whose Ali’s Alley would become one of the most celebrated venues of the 1970s loft scene (2016:45). Heller identifies four important attributes of the loft scene:

Despite the fact that many were not housed in literal lofts (i.e. former factories), loft practices came to be defined by a number of key characteristics, including (1) low admission charges or suggested donations, (2) casual atmospheres that blurred the distinction between performer and audience, (3) ownership/administration by musicians, and (4) mixed-use spaces that combined both private living areas and public presentation space. (Heller 2016: 68)

The 1970s loft scene initially developed in part so that the new music could be presented in venues where the atmosphere was more in tune with the everyday life of the musicians who performed it. As Frank Lowe notes in a 1974 interview,

People have families, people grow up, people relate to each other in self-productive ways. As time passes this is happening more, but people still tend to think of this music as something where you have to put on some slick clothes, get high, and go down into some dungeon in order to listen to it. Instead of relaxing, bringing your mother, your kids and going out and having some food and just breathing and relaxing and enjoying the music. (in Palmer 1974b: 41)

In many ways, the network of downtown lofts did deliver Lowe’s vision of bringing the music out of the “dungeons” he describes. Because the proprietors of the lofts, in most cases, were the musicians themselves, the spaces uniquely catered to musicians’ needs.
Five of the most important and active loft spaces during the mid 1970s, the height of attention to the scene, were Sam Rivers’ Studio Rivbea (24 Bond St), Rashied Ali’s Ali’s Alley (77 Greene Street), Joe Lee Wilson’s Ladies Fort (briefly booked by Stanley Crouch, at 2 Bond St), James DuBois and Juma Sultan’s Studio We (193 Eldridge Street) (Crouch 1977), and percussionist Warren Smith’s Studio WIS (established in 1967 at 151 West 21st Street) (Gluck 2015:21-22). Studio WIS, Ali’s Alley, and Ladies Fort were all publicized nationally through their listings in *Down Beat*'s “City Scene” section (9.8.1977:60). Ali’s Alley, unlike other loft spaces, also had a bar and tables, and served soul food (Heller 2016:66).

Each loft featured a wide range of musical expression (Heller 2016:48), but without a doubt a good deal of the playing at certain lofts was of the “energy music” variety, featuring intense, dense, total improvisation. Daniel Carter remembers his initial impressions of Studio We:

My first impression of Studio We was as kind of a wild and wooly, no-holds barred [environment]...It was all these horns! I was writing [notated] music before I came to New York, so a lot of times I’d be like, ‘Okay, when are these horns going to stop and we can do something?’ They really initiated me to the value of group playing. (in Heller 2016:48-49)

**World Music in the United States**

Another aim of this dissertation is to explore the impact of the
dissemination of world music traditions in the United States on jazz and creative music. Beginning in 1950 with the establishment of Folkways records, and gaining significant momentum with the establishment of the first dedicated ethnomusicology program at an American university at UCLA in 1960, the 1950s, 60s, and 70s were decades in which the American public began to have much greater access to music from around the world. This access took the form of records, touring ensembles, and importantly, masters of the tradition that would come to reside in ethnomusicology departments across the nation.

Travis Jackson lists the many seminal record companies that were dedicated to preserving and marketing music from throughout the world. Jackson explains that by and large, however, these recordings were limited to traditional musics that were already being studied by ethnomusicologists.

When, in fact, the introduction of lower-cost and relatively portable magnetic tape machines in the late 1940s made high-quality field recordings and sound production more affordable, the institutions, labels, and series that started marketing the recordings—Musée de L’Homme in Paris (1948), Folkways (1950), the Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music (1955), Ocora-Radio France (1957), the UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music of the World (1961), and Nonesuch Explorer (1966), for example—focused on traditional styles. (Jackson 2013:711)

Given that many of these labels did not exist until the 1950s and were not

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5 Originally established as Asch records in 1940 by Moe Asch to distribute records of Jewish music, following RCA records’ decision in 1939 to stop producing them (Olmstead 2003:16). Olmstead writes that Folkways began as an “Independent operation in late 1947-early 1948” (ibid:66). However, the 1950 date that Jackson cites (below) most likely refers to when the label began releasing recordings of traditional music from around the world on a significant scale.
widely available in the US until much later, many musicians in the United States in the 1930s and 40s would only be familiar with traditional musics from outside Europe and North America through direct contact.

This is not to say that these materials were completely unavailable. Henry Cowell purchased 120 cylinders of world music recordings in 1931 for the New School in New York, “giving the school what probably was the first collection of non-Western music in the United States” (Sachs 2012:190). While Cowell is primarily remembered as a composer, Sachs points out the importance with which Cowell regarded his ethnomusicological inquiries, stating that “Like Bartók, Henry considered his studies of other musical systems as important as composing. . . In 1927 he began studying the raga and tala system of North India with Sahat Lahiri, and Arabic music with an unnamed teacher” (ibid.).


While many recordings of traditional world musics were not widely available until the late 50s and 1960s, in the early 1950s there was one record in particular that would introduce many African American musicians to the drumming traditions of Africa and the African diaspora. Robin Kelley writes:

The ethnographic recording many African American musicians did take seriously was African and Afro-American Drums, a two-LP collection assembled by anthropologist Harold Courlander and derived from field recordings made in Rwanda, Nigeria, Congo, South Africa, and
Madagascar, as well as Cuba, Haiti, Brazil, Jamaica, Suriname, and New York City. This record circulated widely in the early to mid-1950s, enabling a new generation of musicians to hear a variety of African and Afro-diasporic rhythms and instrumentation. ⁶ (Kelley 2012:15)

In the 1940s and early 1950s, the contact that jazz musicians had with non-Western music (primarily African and diasporic music) was mostly through first-hand experience. One seminal collaboration between jazz musicians and musicians from elsewhere in the African diaspora is the collaboration between Dizzy Gillespie and Chano Pozo. Jason Stanyek regards this collaboration as a signal moment in the history of pan-African collaborations that “activated a distinct lineage of Pan-African music making but can also be seen as one of the germinial moments in the history of intercultural music making in the second half of the twentieth century” (2005:88). While this was one of the first highly publicized pan-African collaborations involving improvisation, traditional African and Afro-diasporic drumming traditions had been performed in well-publicized concerts around the country since the 1930s with Sierra Leonean Asadata Dafora leading the first professional African-based drum and dance troupe (Charry 2005: 9). Also in the 1930s Ravi Shankar would tour the United States with his brother Uday Shankar’s troupe.

Our troupe made its American debut in 1932 . . . Our week in New York was like a fantasy...In New York, we heard jazz played live for the first time; there was Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong. (1968:68-69)

Yusef Lateef also benefitted musically from the immigrant population of his city, Detroit. Initially introduced to the Middle Eastern stringed instrument known as

⁶ Kelley explains in a citation that he was introduced to the record by percussionist Neil Clarke.
the rabat through an auto factory colleague, he also discovered many Middle Eastern wind instruments by chance at ethnic marketplaces.

While visiting the Eastern Market, one of Detroit’s landmark shopping districts with a variety of ethnic items, I used to go to the Syrian spice store and I discovered instruments such as the argol, a double reed, bamboo flute. Like the rabat, I eventually incorporated it into the upcoming albums of the late fifties. (Lateef 2006:46)

Increasingly, throughout the 1950s, American musicians would tour Africa and Asia under the auspices of the State Department program. In an effort to project a positive view of American race relations throughout the world in order to gain allies amongst black and brown people in the non-aligned “Third World” in the midst of the Cold War, the State Department began a program to depict jazz and black music as quintessentially American and promote racially integrated bands.

Speaking of its intentions to counter Soviet propaganda that focused on American racism, Dizzy Gillespie said, “Instead of talking about a cold war...we can call it a ‘cool war’ from now on” (in Monson 2007:121). Gillespie, who gave one of the first tours in 1956, initially brought his big band to countries throughout the Middle East, South Asia and Southeastern Europe (ibid. 123). During these tours Gillespie and his band mates were exposed to the local music of the countries that they performed in. Gillespie, in particular was interested in playing with local musicians, including performing with “a single-stringed violin player in Daca (Dhaka) and a sarangi player in Karachi” (ibid. 125). Other musicians who toured through the program in the 1950s and 60s included Dave Brubeck, Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington, Woody Herman, and Randy Weston.
Another important event in the history of the State Department program was Louis Armstrong’s visit to Ghana in 1956, on the eve of Ghana’s independence (Feld 2012:215). Steven Feld describes this as a watershed moment in African and diasporan musical relations, describing how Armstrong’s visit and performances ushered in an intercultural exchange that would ensure that future Ghanaian musicians would, “position their listening biographies in the larger Black Atlantic cosmopolitan transit that joins Ghana and the Caribbean with the ever-present figure of American jazz, remembered in Accra most powerfully by the presence of Louis Armstrong” (ibid. 219).

1960 saw the establishment of the Ethnomusicology program at UCLA and the birth of an American approach to ethnomusicology that considered learning to perform world traditions as important as studying them intellectually. The program (at the time an “Organized Research Unit”) was founded by ethnomusicologist Mantle Hood, a specialist in Indonesian music who joined the Music Department in 1954 (Conner 2011). Hood’s insistence on learning to play “non-Western” musics competently, which he would later theorize more fully in his article “The Challenge of ‘Bi-Musicality’” (1960), would become an important influence on American ethnomusicology programs. Hood’s orientation towards performance would provide a template for future American ethnomusicology programs, which, in many cases, placed an equal emphasis on scholarship and performance. This emphasis on performance would prove useful to young jazz and creative musicians who wanted to seriously study world traditions in order to

(VonEschen 2006:47-54, 154,156)
incorporate aspects of them into their own conception.

In 1961 Wesleyan University began to establish their own program with the hiring of ethnomusicologist and UCLA graduate Bob Brown (Slobin 2010:40). This program would become an important resource for young musicians who wanted to study traditional music with established masters. Other important ethnomusicology programs were established in the 1960s at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and the University of Washington. Wesleyan University, in particular, was an important resource for young jazz and creative musicians, with Jay Hoggard (as a Wesleyan student), Anthony Davis, Gerry Hemingway, Wes Brown, John McLaughlin and others studying various world traditions there in the 1970s (Hoggard, Davis, Hemingway 2014, Fellesz 2011).

In addition to these formalized courses of study in university settings, Karl Berger would open Creative Music Studio in the early 1970s as an alternative space to learn various world traditions from a diverse roster of musicians from different world traditions. This roster would eventually grow to include Nana Vasconcelos, Trilok Gurtu, Aiyb Dieng, Foday Musa Suso, and Babatunde Olatunji (Sweet 1996:15-17).

**Relationship Between Creative Music and The Academy**

In his dissertation “Listening at the Edges,” focusing on New York’s Lower East Side Avant-Jazz scene, Matthew Somoroff quotes Patricia Nicholson Parker’s somewhat hyperbolic eulogy to Roy Campbell: “His music was not born in a university, but came from the struggle that he endured every day as a black
man and as a human being trying to raise up and rise up” (Somoroff 2014:334). This opens up many questions: What is a music born in a university? Are the two mutually exclusive? In this account, the university is necessarily coded as white, a place of privilege where authentic “black” expression is impossible.

Composer/improviser Henry Threadgill dismisses this line of thinking in *Future Jazz*: “I went to all the music schools-universities, colleges, conservatories-all around this country, on the university level for eleven years, partly on the GI bill, partly on my own. I was constantly studying at these places, taking every course in music they had to offer” (Mandel, 1999:68).

The New Haven scene is particularly interesting because of its relationship to the academy. Although many of the artists that I profile in this dissertation were never officially enrolled at Wesleyan or Yale (Gerry Hemingway, Pheeroan akLaff, Wadada Leo Smith), their informal study at both of these universities was influential to their overall musical and philosophical formation. Conversely, some of these artists who studied music formally in an academic setting were skeptical of the value of institutional structures in general. As Anthony Davis recounts: “[My classmates and I] were very suspicious of schools. I think that was a very favorable environment for people who wanted to try and do different things - not the school itself, but the fact that everyone had doubts about the institutions” (in B. Smith 1980:7).

This dissertation seeks to problematize a simplistic view of “academic” music making, and will attempt to break down the now familiar binary of academy/street learning, which has become a trope in jazz discourse. This project
is particularly timely as creative musicians increasingly meet in university settings educated by musicians of the generation that I chronicle in this dissertation (see Scherbenske 2014).

The relationship between Anthony Davis, Pheeroan akLaff, Jay Hoggard, and Wadada Leo Smith to a vibrant scene of scholarly activity centered around theorizing Afro-diasporic creativity active at Yale, points to the interpenetration of musical and philosophical development during this time that has not been explored in depth. The close and enduring ties between these composers/improvisers and scholars sheds new light on the cultural milieu that created both the music and scholarly approaches to understanding the artistic creativity of the African diaspora.

**Fieldwork and Methodology**

My fieldwork was tied to my work as a performer and my experiences at Wesleyan University in Middletown, CT. Many of the people that I interviewed I knew through performing in various ensembles in New York City, or as professors at Wesleyan with whom I worked closely. Because of this, it was relatively easy for me to find interview subjects through these ties. My dual residence in Middletown and Brooklyn gave me ready access to many composer/improvisers. Because of New York City’s central place in jazz and creative music, musicians who no longer lived on the East Coast would often come to New York to perform at various venues, particularly the Stone in the East Village and Roulette in Brooklyn.
Often, I would approach musicians after performances to explain my project and ask for their contact information. The musicians who I interviewed knew me in many different capacities: as a player, composer, and a graduate student. The tone and content in each interview, accordingly, was influenced by the relationships that I had with them. In general, the composer/improvisers that I spoke with had many fond memories of their initial musical development in the 1970s, and often interviews that I prepared a few questions for would last from 1 to 3 hours.

Primary among my concerns was to understand how each musician was influenced by their study of world traditions and experimental approaches to improvisation. While many of the questions were individualized based on my familiarity with their music and background, there were two sets of questions that I asked every participant:

1) “How do you feel that your music has been influenced by your study of traditional musics from around the world? Can you give me some specific examples?”; and 2) “Do you have a name for any of your compositional techniques? (for example the creation of longer cyclic forms out of overlapping smaller cycles).” I was also interested in listening patterns and material culture, often asking participants what kind of recorded traditional musics they were first exposed to, and how they began playing creative music.

The shape of my dissertation changed over the course of time based on the information that I was able to gather from each musician. I also made sure to see many of the composer/improvisers that I interviewed perform live. The
performances that I attended and participated in also shaped my focus. For example, seeing various performances of the Tri-Centric Orchestra, working with Anthony Braxton, and performing with many of the members of that orchestra clued me into a whole network of musicians working on experimental approaches to improvisation and composition. Participating in the Jazz Composers Orchestra Institute gave me the opportunity to study composition with some of the composer/improvisers that this dissertation focuses on, and gave me increased insight into their individual musical aesthetics and pedagogical styles.

To get a sense of the larger issues and trends that were happening in the world of jazz and creative music, I studied the microfilm of every *Down Beat* Magazine issue from 1973 to 1987, the period during which many of the subjects of this dissertation were most active. The 1980s were also a crucial period of political upheaval in the jazz and creative music community and looking at the magazine with an eye towards these trends was invaluable. *Coda*, a magazine that was dedicated to the more experimental strands of the music, was an especially fruitful source. It often featured more in-depth interviews than *Down Beat* and more substantial articles. Many of the composer/improvisers that I spoke to cited *Coda* as important to their early development. James Newton remembers learning more about George Lewis, a composer whose music had already piqued Newton’s interest, in the magazine: “I remember reading in *Coda*, I remember seeing...this guy’s into Kierkegaard and all of these different people and played with Basie. He was really at the forefront of the music” (Newton interview 2016a). Peter Apfelbaum also acknowledges the
magazine’s importance: “I was getting Coda Magazine, I’d read that one cover to cover... that was a really important one for all of us” (Apfelbaum interview 2016a).

**Chapter Overview**

Chapter 1 and 2 look at the formative years of many of the musicians who would constitute what Gerry Hemingway describes as “The New Haven School” (Hemingway interview 2014). Meeting largely through serendipitous circumstances between the years of 1969 and 1978, these musicians would eventually create individual concepts influenced by AACM ideas of combining composition and improvisation in novel ways, as well as their study of traditional musics from around the world. Yale and Wesleyan Universities were important hubs for these young musicians, many of which only attended classes at either school informally.

Many of these young musicians would come in contact with the scholars of Yale’s African American Studies program. At the time under the stewardship of Anthony Davis’ father Charles T. Davis, Yale’s program was an important hotbed for theorizing pan-African approaches to scholarship and cultural production. This would prove to be important to future recordings of these artists, such as Anthony Davis’ *Hemispheres*, which draws on Yoruba mythology and features liner notes by Henry Louis Gates, a scholar mentored by the elder Davis.

These chapters also explore the influence of AACM member Leo Smith on
these young musicians. Smith was active in promoting solo concerts, self-publishing his thoughts on improvisation (a revolutionary idea in 1973), and producing his own records. Smith’s model of economic and artistic self-determination and self-definition had a great impact on this cohort of younger musicians. His ideas would be especially influential on Gerry Hemingway who would found his own record company, Auricle, in 1978. Many of these artists, including Smith, would also take advantage of Wesleyan’s newly created World Music program to engage in study of different world traditions. This chapter also explores the connection between this New Haven cohort and the loft scene in NYC from 1972-1976.

I also analyze two seminal recordings that feature Ghanaian master drummer and Wesleyan adjunct professor Abraham Adzenyah—Clifford Thornton’s *In the Gardens of Harlem* (1975) and Marion Brown’s *Geechee Recollections* (1973)—exploring the kind of intercultural and pan-African music making that many of the musicians active in the New Haven scene were engaged in during the 1970s.

Chapter 3 examines the creation of CMS and the development of CMS as a full-time school. I explore the adoption of the “creative music” moniker, and the school’s impact on the broader creative music scene in NYC. In many ways, the work that was being done at CMS was not radically different from what was happening at the same time in New Haven. This is not surprising given the prominence of New Haven-area associated composer/improvisers within the ranks of CMS guiding artists, such as Anthony Davis, Pheeroan akLaff, Robert
Dick, Mark Helias, Ed Blackwell, Leo Smith, and George Lewis (Sweet 1996:15-17).

In many instances, CMS was a seminal experience in these artists’ development as pedagogues. In addition to providing a forum for these artists to hone their teaching skills, CMS became an important place to perform and for teachers and students alike to meet new musicians from the area. Anthony Davis recounts that the route between New Haven and Woodstock quickly became a familiar one for him (Davis interview 2014).

I also explore the philosophy of intercultural improvisation that drove many of the important collaborations at the CMS, comparing and contrasting it with intercultural collaborations in the New Haven scene. I go on to examine the influence of Ornette Coleman’s philosophies as structuring devices for the school, Don Cherry’s influence on Berger’s pedagogy, and the importance of CMS to the development of conducted improvisation.

Chapter 4 looks at the eventual exodus that many of these musicians eventually made for New York City. Davis, akLaff, Hoggard, Hemingway all left New Haven for NYC in the late 70s with George Lewis leaving slightly earlier. Wadada Leo Smith would move to Brooklyn in the 1980s. Although these younger musicians’ formative years were spent in New Haven, some of their most important work was realized in New York. In the 1980s Anthony Davis and other young musicians of this cohort would write music that would synthesize the diverse musical influences absorbed during their New Haven period. Additionally, Mark Dresser and Gerry Hemingway who met in New Haven, would
join Woodstock resident and CMS teacher Anthony Braxton, along with CMS student Marilyn Crispell (who would replace George Lewis) to form his iconic quartet in the early 1980s (see Lock 1988). Members of the New Haven cohort and the students and teachers of CMS would collaborate on multiple projects during the 1980s.

A fascinating time for jazz and creative music, many of these musicians and their collaborators enjoyed mainstream jazz exposure, with Anthony Davis, Jay Hoggard, Abdul Wadud and James Newton all taking part in the Young Lions LP. An influential record that would reintroduce the term “young lions” into the popular vocabulary, the record also featured a young Wynton Marsalis (although none of his compositions are featured). Bruce Lundvall explains: “When I had the Elektra/Musician label I handpicked some of the more important young players, most of whom were also composers: Wynton, Bobby McFerrin, Anthony Davis...Some of them made it and some of them didn’t” (Mandel 1999:8). Clearly, the reality of the situation is much more complicated.

In Chapter 4, I unpack Lundvall’s statement, exploring what it means to “make it,” and the factors that lead to the continued commercial success of some artists at the expense of others in the politically charged atmosphere of the 1980s. I also look at the personal relationship between Stanley Crouch, Davis, and other members of this group as a window into the larger political struggles around the music during this period.

I examine the catalog of Gramavision records, founded by Jonathan F.P. Rose, a classmate of Anthony Davis and George Lewis at Yale. An important
outlet for the music of Davis, Hoggard, akLaff, and other young artists of the New Haven cohort and their collaborators, Gramavision was vitally important for helping define the sound of creative music and progressive jazz in the 1980s. I look at the continued development of Anthony Davis’ music and explore his orchestral work and operas that combined his many influences and allowed him to develop increasingly sophisticated approaches to combining composition and improvisation.

Chapter 5 examines the continued influence of these composer/improvisers on creative music production and scholarship. In the introduction to his collection *People Get Ready* (2013), Ajay Heble lists many of these composer/improviser/scholars as vitally important to music education. Heble also remarks on the lack of scholarship studying the effect that they have had on post-secondary musical education. Naming Wadada Leo Smith, Anthony Davis, George Lewis, Anthony Braxton, Mark Dresser, and Gerry Hemingway as musicians who are “currently directly educating students in an institutional format” (Heble 2013:20), Heble goes on to say that, “We suggest that more research on the vital pedagogical rule played by ‘famous’ jazz artists of the free jazz movement is essential for understanding the transformative power of this music, outside of the ways jazz and other forms of music are often judged in the marketplace” (ibid.). I examine the impact that Smith, Braxton, Lewis, and others have had on developing original approaches to teaching and theorizing music and music scholarship.

In this chapter I also look at the contribution of these
composer/improvisers to the New Jazz Studies, and the importance of John Zorn’s label, venue, and book series on the continued development of musicians active in the New Haven and CMS scenes. I go on to focus on creative large ensembles in the 2010s and compare and contrast the approaches between two large ensemble initiatives, the JCOI (George Lewis, Anthony Davis, James Newton, etc.) and the Tri-Centric Orchestra (Anthony Braxton) that seek to bring improvisation and creative music concepts into an orchestral setting in different ways.

Returning to New Haven, I look at the contemporary state of creative music making there, and the reunion of Wadada Leo Smith with Pheeroan akLaff and Anthony Davis. To conclude the chapter, I compare the contemporary projects of three saxophonists, Kamasi Washington, James Brandon Lewis, and Steve Lehman, who have engaged in the kind of musical education and formation that I describe in this dissertation.
Chapter 1: Creative Music in New Haven 1969-1978, Part 1

In 1969 George Lewis and Anthony Davis arrived in New Haven to study at Yale University. The period between 1969 and 1978 was a formative one in the lives of quite a few young musicians who would help shape the future of creative music production and scholarship, including many of those who would become active in the greater New Haven area. In 1977 and 1978 many of these musicians, with the important exception of Wadada Leo Smith, would make a mass exodus to New York City.

The cohort of composer/improvisers who were based in New Haven or Middletown during this period includes the younger generation of Mark Helias (b. 1950), Dwight Andrews (b. 1951), Wes Brown (b. 1952), Mark Dresser (b.1952), Jay Hoggard (b. 1954), and Pheeroan akLaff (b.1955), as well as more established artists like Marion Brown (1931-2010), Clifford Thornton (1936-1989), Leo Smith (b. 1941) (who arrived in 1971), and Bobby Naughton (b.1944).\(^7\) Michael Gregory Jackson (b. 1953) and Gerry Hemingway (b.1955) both grew up in the New Haven area (see Table 2 for a list of musicians involved in the New Have scene and their arrival dates).

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\(^7\) Thornton, despite commuting from New York, had close ties to musicians in Connecticut through his teaching position at Wesleyan (Palmer 1975).
Table 2: New Haven Scene: Birth Year and Arrival

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Birth Year</th>
<th>Arrived in New Haven Area</th>
<th>Arrived in New York (if Applicable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marion Brown</td>
<td>1931-2010</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clifford Thornton</td>
<td>1936-1989</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wadada Leo Smith</td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobby Naughton</td>
<td>1944</td>
<td>1969</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Helias</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>1974</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wes Brown</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>1970</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony Davis</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Lewis</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwight Andrews</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Dresser</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Gregory</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Native</td>
<td>1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay Hoggard</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerry Hemingway</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Native</td>
<td>1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pheeroan akLaff</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>1978</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The period between 1969 and 1978, which included the founding of the Creative Music Improvisers Forum by Leo Smith and others, was one of intense activity in the creative music community in and around New Haven. These young musicians would meet largely through serendipitous events, and create a distinct approach to music influenced by their studies with AACM member Leo Smith, who would introduce many of these younger musicians to different world musics as well as older jazz traditions. Beyond Smith’s influence on these musicians, a general orientation towards radical politics and pan-Africanism that was emblematic of the late 1960s and early 1970s would also influence the music that this group would create both during and after their time.
in Connecticut.

New Haven, while just 70 miles outside of New York City, has a storied history and strong identity of its own. Because of its simultaneous proximity to and distance from New York, this group of composer/improvisers was able to create a music that was attuned to, but ultimately distinct from, the music associated with the New York City loft scene in the 1970s. Drummer Gerry Hemingway (b. 1955), one of the younger members of this cohort, relates what he believes are some of the defining features of this scene.

the thing about New Haven that was different than New York was that you didn’t feel like you were under a lot of pressure. A: the rents weren’t so steep and you could manage living there on relatively little money. Yet you had the proximity to New York and you were kind of keen on what was going on. At the same time, you weren’t under pressure to conform to what was going on. You could just do your own thing and develop your own music at your own rate and that proved to be a very important. That might be one of THE most important points about the New Haven scene, period is that, people did manage a very independent position, or point of view. A curiosity about things that no one else is paying attention to so much, or it wasn’t so much the main thread of the New York narrative or whatever. (Hemingway interview 2014)

While one may argue that many of the musicians in New Haven were students, and that musicians in New York were actively pursuing professional careers, there were also quite a few older, more established musicians active on the scene, including Bobby Naughton, Marion Brown, and Leo Smith. However, there was much less financial pressure on many of the musicians active in the New Haven scene than their New York counterparts due to a lower cost of living. Hemingway
also believes that musicians in New Haven developed a philosophy that extended the then-developing ideas associated with various members of the AACM about combining improvisation and composition.

I think if I were to characterize whatever that might be, I might say that the main thing that distinguished the eventual New Haven School or New Haven school of thought from everything else, it was that...in somewhat parallel motion to the AACM...But perhaps in a slightly more rigorous way...this thing about composition and improvisation being put together in very elaborate dimensions. *A la* Leo’s position, Anthony Davis’ point of view, and some of the rest of us who have experimented with musical formalities that were elaborate, a linear composition basically. There were series’ of events where lots of different things happened. There were suites of pieces. The Ellington thing hit hard in New Haven (ibid.)

During this era there was a period of intense growth in world and experimental music at Wesleyan University, in Middletown, CT, 20 miles north of New Haven. Many of the musicians of this cohort would also take advantage of this resource, studying various world musics with the newly hired artists-in-residence. This cohort of musicians, the majority of whom attended elite New England universities had access to a much greater range of resources than the previous generation of creative musicians. The group, overall, was also much more upwardly mobile than many of the members of the 1960s collectives. Differentiating them from their predecessors, these musicians had a level of access to world music performance ensembles and a range of scholarly inquiry that was unavailable or non-existent during the musical formation of many of the members of the 1960s collectives.

David Blake in his dissertation “*Bildung* Culture: Elite Popular Music and
the American University 1960-2010,” writes that “the university imparts an approach to culture which is then applied to extracurricular popular music practices. Here I follow Bourdieu in theorizing higher education as a habitus of dispositions that both generates and systematizes tastes” (2014:10).

While I agree with Blake in certain respects, I argue that the process for many of these musicians was a much more dynamic one. Not only were these musicians influenced by the university’s “approach to culture,” but the musical communities centered around these schools and the programs of the universities themselves were influenced by the activities of musicians who brought in their own culture (from the NYC loft scene, the AACM, etc.) from outside the university. In any case, the musicians of this cohort, through their experiences at Yale and Wesleyan would form a distinct approach to musical production, informed by a range of activities. Chief among these were their exposure to world music traditions, and their experiences with a circle of scholars devoted to theorizing the connections between Afro-diasporic and African culture.

In this chapter I introduce the biographies of many of the key players in the New Haven scene to give the reader a sense of their backgrounds and early musical formation. Each of these musicians’ eclectic interests and openness towards the wide variety of musical expression that existed in the 1960s and 70s would shape their individual aesthetics in important ways.
i. Wadada Leo Smith

Leo Smith, born in 1941 in Leland, Mississippi, grew up with a strong connection to the blues tradition. Simply growing up in the Mississippi delta would have given Smith ample access to the blues, but through his stepfather Alex “Little Bill” Wallace, “a well-known guitarist who had a pioneering radio show and helped book performers in the region” (Lutz 2016:32), he was afforded the opportunity to meet masters of the tradition at an early age. Smith recalls that “celebrated blues players, like, B.B. King and Little Milton” visited his home (ibid).

Smith began playing trumpet at the age of 12, finding a local blues band to perform with a few months later, and would quickly find himself playing 4 or 5 nights a week, even touring locally with this group at the young age of 13. He recalls that around the time he began to play the trumpet he started to sketch out rudimentary compositions, drawing on what musical knowledge he had already acquired (Smith interviewed by Bynum 2011a:4).

I started out with both of these things right around three months before I turned thirteen, both composing and playing the trumpet. And I’ve never asked anybody for a composition lesson in my life. (ibid.)

Although Smith was self-taught, his experiences with a wealth of innovative collaborators and bandleaders, especially in Chicago beginning in 1967 with saxophonist/composer Anthony Braxton (b.1945) and pianist/composer Muhal Richard Abrams (b. 1930), would give him more than enough material and inspiration to develop a well thought out concept deeply informed by a range of African American traditions. Ostensibly, his lack of formal
training allowed him the freedom to develop a highly original approach to composition that formal training may have denied him. Smith’s emphasis on originality and cultivating a personal compositional practice were lessons that he would impart to the young composer/improvisers of the New Haven scene. After a tour of service in the Army, Smith would move to Chicago as a young man, joining the AACM in 1967.

As his tour of duty came to a close, a fellow traveler gave him Anthony Braxton’s contact information in Chicago. Leaving the service in 1967, Smith headed to the Windy City and was soon running through Ornette Coleman tunes with Braxton. (Lutz 2016:34)

Smith recalls that soon upon arrival he met many other musicians active in the AACM:

later I met the other guys that were changing the scene—you know, Roscoe and Joseph and Lester Bowie, Christopher Gaddy and Charles Clark, Thurman Barker and all the guys from that (W.L. Smith interviewed by Bynum 2011a: 26).

After spending time in Paris in 1969, Smith decided to leave, arriving in New Haven in the winter of 70/71 at the suggestion of Marion Brown (Smith interview 2015). Brown arrived in New Haven from a brief stay in Atlanta in the summer of 1970 to be closer to New York, taking a job teaching music at a local elementary school (Brown 1976:178). Brown describes the circumstances of their first meeting:

I had met Leo [in 1970] in Amherst, Massachusetts. He was en route to New York City to perform with Muhal Richard Abrams, and Steve McCall.

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8 George Lewis attributes a significant portion of the creative development of early AACM artists to their autodidactic activities (2008:15-19).
Steve and Muhal were in Amherst to perform with me at the New Africa House....This was the beginning of a wonderful period of development, both for Leo, and myself. (Brown 1976: 179)

Smith states that he was interested in coming to the East Coast, but had no intention of moving to New York.

And what I decided to do was come to Connecticut. I had met Marion Brown, like, a month or so earlier, and he had given me an invitation that if I did come out east and didn’t want to move to New York, I should come to New Haven. He had expressed ideas that we could put together a group, because he wasn’t working at all here, actually...So I came here, and we immediately started playing music around town. Nobody was presenting their own concerts until we started. It opened up a whole ‘nother scene. (W.L. Smith interviewed by Bynum 2011a: 51)

The duo of Smith and Brown, known as the Creative Improvisation Ensemble, consisted of Smith and Brown each playing multiple instruments, with an emphasis on homemade “instrument constructions.” A recording documenting this duo collaboration live in Paris in May of 1970 can be found on the self-titled *Creative Improvisation Ensemble* (1975) on Freedom records. Like many members of the AACM, including Henry Threadgill (b.1944) and Douglas Ewart (b.1946), who created instruments out of found materials, Brown and Smith created a large assembly of original “constructions.” Brown explains the process:

> We spent as much time together looking for items we could use to construct musical instruments. We went to junk yards, hardware stores, restaurant suppliers, everywhere we possibly could, to find items to be used for instrument construction. In the evenings, we practiced on our constructions in order to bring them together in some form of music.

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9 Smith and Brown spent some time in Europe performing together before Smith ultimately settled in the New Haven area.
association. We performed at Yale University several times, and at one of the local coffee shops, the Exit. (1976:179)

Soon after arriving in New Haven, Smith would find a group of talented and intellectually curious young musicians who wanted to learn from him. Anthony Davis recalls his first encounter with Smith and Brown.

I met Wadada when I was...at Yale...He and Marion Brown were putting posters up for a duo concert that they were playing. I went up to talk to them ‘where’s the concert? blah, blah, blah’ and went to hear them and all that. (Davis interview 2014)

Anthony Davis, in particular, spent hours with Smith listening to records and learning about the history of jazz and creative music. Davis explains the impact that his informal study with Smith had on his overall musical conception.

I was with him at the beginning of the Ahkreanvention, a lot of that stuff in the early 70s.... it’s interesting because it’s also, when I was doing Reflectactivity (1975) or something like that, the suggestion had to do with our...not just with the music that we were playing but what I was learning from Wadada, just hanging out with him and listening to music.10 So for example, Reflectactivity is dedicated to Duke Ellington, so that meant a lot to me when I played the music. There’s stuff in there, I was kind of playing stride but in a more abstract way of playing stride, but yet it’s still stride on some level. (ibid.)

In retrospect, Smith seems to be equally impressed with the amount of young talent that he found upon moving to New Haven:

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10 Ahkreanvention is Smith’s 1970s name for his graphic notation practice, later named Ankhrasmtion, a portmanteau which Eric Porter describes: “‘Ankh’ referred to as a ‘vital life force’ as symbolized by the Egyptian ankh cross. ‘Ras’ was the Ethiopian male honorific, embraced by the Rastafarian religion as a sign of respect; it was also a reference to the Egyptian sun god Ra. ‘Ma’ simply referred to ‘mother’” (Porter 2002:268). Reflectactivity is an album that was recorded in 1974 featuring Davis and Wes Brown.
when I first came here—look, man, Davis and George Lewis, Wes Brown, all of those guys—they was playing with me, but, you know, they all was engaged into how information is shared, you know? So that tradition has been going on for a while in this town. Even started with Marion Brown. I mean, we opened up this town for at least an approach to creative music when nothing was happening...And it blossomed into a nice little scene. Davis and them guys—they were playing...anywhere they could find.

(Smith interviewed by Bynum 2011b: 8)

Influenced by his involvement in the AACM, Leo Smith became one of the early adopters of the word “creative music” to refer to the African American improvised music tradition. Many of the musicians who performed and studied with Smith continue to use the term to describe their musical practice on some level.

Pheeroan akLaff, a drummer and percussionist who would end up working extensively with Smith, describes one of their initial encounters:

I saw him on the street putting up posters for his solo concert…and I said ‘man, are you going to do a solo trumpet concert?’ He said ‘yeah, you should come.’ I said ‘ok…I’ll be there.’ (akLaff interview 2014)

Solo trumpet concerts were relatively rare in the 1970s (Dewar 2004), and fellow AACM member Anthony Braxton’s solo saxophone recording *For Alto* (1969), recorded in 1968, was the first full-length unaccompanied saxophone album, and it counts among the first solo saxophone recordings after Coleman Hawkins’ 1945 recording “Variations,” 1948 recording “Picasso,” and Eric Dolphy’s 1960 recording “Lovely” (Dewar 2010:70). Dewar also mentions Jimmy Giuffre’s five improvised solo clarinet pieces recorded in 1963 as an important contribution to the genre, going on to state that: “After Giuffre, it was most
notably the Chicago-based AACM musicians who recorded and released unaccompanied solos, with trumpeter Lester Bowie, saxophonist Roscoe Mitchell, and bassist Malachi Favors recording solos in 1968” (ibid. 70).

Solo concerts became an important aspect of the performance practice of AACM artists. Solo concerts gave these composer/improvisers the chance to present their personal musical universe free from outside influences or constraints. Anthony Braxton, modeling his early formation as an AACM artist, still encourages students to create concepts and repertoire for solo music, small group music, and large group music (Interview with Braxton 2012). This emphasis on creating solo, small, and large ensemble music is also displayed on the AACM website, which states:

The AACM has continuously achieved international recognition for its contributions in modern music. AACM groups have performed in Moscow, Japan, Europe, Africa, and the USA. Members are regularly awarded grants and commissions to compose music for solo instrument, small ensemble and full orchestra (emphasis mine) (“About Us”)

Smith relates that, although it wasn’t an official AACM policy,

this was part of the nomenclature of how people understood performances should be done. No one said that you had to do this or do that, it was simply the way in which we began to organize. Everybody began to do solos and smaller ensembles and larger ensembles, which we defined as orchestras at that time. (Smith interview 2015)

Through his self-promotion, DIY aesthetic, and presentation of solo concerts that served to showcase his individual musical conception without the influence of collaborators, Smith embodied personal self-definition and self-determination. In the promotion as well as the actual performance of his solo
music Smith refused to rely on any outside help. Although, as Monson (2010:17) points out, collective self-determination was a defining feature of the Black Power and Black Arts movements more generally, personal self-definition became an important part of the creative music philosophy espoused by the AACM, and Smith in particular. Smith writes:

> it is necessary that every black creative artist document for himself, by whatever means available, all that he has to say. my warning to black people in all disciplines of life (the arts, sports, sciences, politics, no matter what) is that it is now time for us to take unto ourselves the process of recording our own history---to take this process from the control of those who are alien by the very being of their identity group to what it is that we are doing. we do not need our creations dissected by others who cannot know what they see. we must not wait for others to document their own distortions of that which we can say rightly for ourselves. so I am self-conscious, and i want every black person to become self-conscious (L. Smith 1973: n.p.)

While the AACM was one of the most successful of the collectives in terms of organization, St. Louis’ Black Artists Group also had a strong ethos of self-determination. In 1972, BAG member Julius Hemphill self-produced *Dogon AD*, released on his Mbari records. As Looker writes:

> even after all his efforts through the BAG collective, Hemphill could find no outlets for the distribution of his music. So he did what the group had done all along: made his own way without a map. He started his own record label, Mbari records, and sat in his LaClede Town house hand-addressing dozens of sample copies to radio stations and magazines. (Looker 2004: 147)

Later, in the mid 1970s Arista Freedom re-released many of these seminal self-produced albums.
Beyond his musical influence on Anthony Davis, Wes Brown, and other young musicians who would informally study with him and perform in his groups, Smith was also actively publishing his philosophy, as well as recording and producing LPs for his own imprint Kabell. Smith started Kabell after a plan for an earlier label, TMS, that he founded with Muhal Richard Abrams and Henry Threadgill in Chicago fell apart. As Smith recalls:

Muhal—him and Threadgill and I got together and organized the first AACM record [label] called TM&S: Threadgill, Muhal and Smith. And for some reason, they had some ambiguous feelings about naming it after the AACM, so they suggested that we just use this thing. And we got it chartered and all that stuff, but it never worked properly. Creative Music-1 was supposed to have been the first release on there, and I never could get it cleared through those guys to release it. They were afraid that I was going to cause them to be sued and this and that and that and this. (Smith interviewed by Bynum 2011a:60)

Smith’s first record, Creative Music-1 (Six Solo Improvisations) (1972) was recorded in 1971 and his document Notes: A New World Music (which is dedicated to: “a pioneer and a sustainer of creative music: edward kennedy ellington, master musician”) is both an explanation of that record as well as a philosophical manifesto on the nature of “creative music.”

The AACM was founded as a forum for composers to present original music (although, as Lewis [2008:103] points out, not in any traditional Eurocentric sense of the term). Smith’s notes, however, is highly critical of European and Euro-American composers, and valorizes improvisation. Smith laments that jazz and creative music have not been properly understood and
appreciated in America, especially by classical composers and the Euro-American critical establishment. Smith finds it deeply troubling that critics and composers who are not well-versed in the African American improvised music tradition are in a position of power to represent it:

(improvisation(creative music)) is still mostly not understood for its truest meaning as art-music.\(^\text{11}\) those largely responsible for this failure have been the music critics of composition and the composers themselves, neither of whom have at any time in their lives been improvisors, and therefore as non-improvisors, cannot be in any way representative of creative music. (1973:n.p.)

Smith, who at the time, was an accomplished composer/improviser and was already working on creating his own notational strategies, clarifies what he means when he rejects composition:

Although an improviser may create and notate certain types of symbols and forms in which to retain creative music, this process is not composition, for any elements of improvisation that are notated are but mere forms to be exploited by creative improvisors. the method and symbols used by the improviser in retaining an improvisation have never been (and must never be) standardized. (ibid.)

Although Smith is a prolific composer, his music always allows for some degree of improvisation. In order to quantify this quality of his music he has coined the term “the creative music object,” which is “a music-object whose significant moments are realized in the present” (Smith 1995:93). In other words, Smith writes pieces that always include a component of improvisation that keeps

\(^{11}\) Although he is critical of the European tradition, his idea of improvisation as “art-music,” in some ways, reflects Romantic ideals (Landgraf 2011).
them from being interpreted the same way. Smith believes that this keeps “creative music” a vital, living tradition, preventing it from the ossification that he sees in the “composed” music of the European tradition.

**ii. Anthony Davis**

Anthony Davis was born in Patterson, New Jersey in 1951, and spent his earliest years in Harlem, New York City. In 1955, his father Charles T. Davis, an English professor and literary critic who founded the African American studies at Pennsylvania State University, received a professorship at Princeton and moved the family to Princeton, New Jersey. Davis would become one of the first African American professors at the university, staying there until 1961 (Routledge-“Charles T. Davis biography;” “Davis interviewed by Brown 1982). The middle-class son of an African American professor, Anthony Davis recalls feeling like an outsider in the town, where the schools had just recently been integrated.

they had just integrated the schools a year before I arrived and that’s the famous Princeton plan. And, you had the white kids who were university professors’ kids, etc., and the black kids were mostly from migrant workers who had settled in Princeton. And then there were--my brother and I were there and we didn’t fit into anything. (Davis interviewed by Brown 1982:2)

During his time in Princeton, at age 7, Davis began playing classical piano. Gifted with a discerning ear, he learned to quickly pick up any composition upon listening to it.

when I started classical piano, when I first became interested my father played and he was playing Mozart or something and I just sat at the piano and I did it by ear. So he looked at me and said ‘ok, wait a second’. But I
found out that I was never a great reader because I could always play by ear...even playing Beethoven sonatas, I could put the Rudolph Serkin record on and then just ‘got it’. (Davis interview 2014)

Davis, who had already developed a strong command of classical piano repertoire, started improvising while living in Italy during 10th grade with his family. He began to compose and improvise during that period out of necessity. Davis simply wasn’t able to bring enough sheet music overseas to satisfy his voracious musical appetite. He was also inspired by the music of Thelonious Monk, a recent discovery. Davis recalls:

I couldn’t bring all of my piano music and they somewhat as a joke gave my father a record, *Monk in Italy*. It was way too out for my dad, he liked Dave Brubeck, but like Art Tatum was god to him, ok, which is great...But I was excited because of the idea that all of the music was Monk’s and the unity between the improvisation and the compositions, so I learned all the tunes on it. (Davis interview 2014)

His initial compositions were based on improvisations influenced by Monk’s music. He also tried to emulate the synthesis of composition and improvisation that he recognized in Monk’s compositions, which would become a hallmark of Davis’ later style.

And then I did my first concert, I did a solo piano recital at the American consulate in Torino and one in Florence and I did a program that was half classical music and half jazz. Monk tunes and then my own, my first original compositions. So that was sort of the beginning... I hardly notated anything, I [was just] learning how to notate so most of them just grew out of improvisations [that] were remembered. (Davis interview 2014)

In 1969 Davis arrived at Yale. Davis relates that he began to compose in earnest during that period, and that these compositional explorations
“coincide(d) with [his] self-discovery as a black person—you know what it meant to be black” (Banfield 2003:313). This self-realization led Davis to become active in campus politics at Yale, becoming a protector for the Black Panthers (Davis interview 2014). This discovery would also manifest musically, with Davis incorporating a variety of different African American traditions into his music.

He was also struck by the pan-African music making that he observed during this period, particularly during his informal studies at Wesleyan, an influence that can be heard on “African Ballad“ and “Song for the Old World” on his album *Song for the Old World* (1978). His compositional output would continue to be marked by an increasingly sophisticated synthesis of his knowledge of Western classical music and a range of African and diasporic traditions.

Upon meeting Leo Smith in 1970/71 Davis began to engage more fully with the history of the piano in jazz and creative music. Smith introduced Davis to the masters of older piano styles, particularly James P. Johnson, and Fats Waller. Through Smith, who he describes as an “Ellingtonphile,” Davis was also introduced to the music of Duke Ellington, whose compositional style would become a major influence. (Davis interview 2014)

Davis, who had previously mostly emulated bebop and post-bop pianists, was profoundly affected by these newfound discoveries. Studying the history of the piano helped him develop a more expansive idea of performing and composing that incorporated the whole range of the instrument and a greater sense of the possibilities of interplay between his left and right hands.
And playing his music opened up a whole different idea about the piano. ‘Cause, previous to that, I had thought of the piano mostly out of the post-bop mode of piano playing, which is essentially no left hand. I mean, I really admired McCoy, Herbie Hancock, and Chick Corea, and all of that kind of--that generation of pianists. Then before that, you know, Bud Powell, and people like that. And I was so really into quote ‘bebop regimen’ piano and then the ‘post-bop’ style. And Leo made me see this; I began to think a lot more about the piano in its historical sense, you know, from James P. Johnson, Fats Waller all up to Ellington, to Monk, and to Cecil Taylor...[Smith] had written a series of pieces from one for Fatha Hines, for Sun Ra, for Cecil Taylor...for a number of important figures. (Davis interviewed by Brown 1982:18)

This influence can be heard in Davis’ solo music as well as the compositions for his ensembles, which often feature complex relationships between the left and right hand. Often, Davis will invert the traditional stride relationship between left and right hands by playing an ostinato in the right hand and improvising counterpoint in the left hand.

In addition to performing with Smith, Davis began working with the musicians at his disposal, which included guitarist Allan Jaffee and saxophonist Hal Lewis. In his freshman year at Yale he put together a band called Contigency, so named because, according to Davis; "we never had a bass player, so we said we were always contingent on getting a bass player, so we called it Contingency” (Davis interview 2014).

During this period Anthony Davis would also meet George Lewis, a trombonist and philosophy major. Davis remembers his first encounter with Lewis:
George I met during my freshman year at an Archie Shepp concert on campus. We had heard about each other, we were always hearing, all the black folks, the black students would say ‘Oh, there’s this crazy negro blah, blah, blah’ and they’d say the same thing to George, ‘oh there’s this crazy negro Anthony Davis, you guys should meet.’ So we went to the Archie Shepp (concert), Sunny Murray was playing...so, anyway they had a jam session after the gig...I was playing piano and then George borrowed [a] trombone and then started playing, and I said, ‘wow, who’s that cat?!’ So then we became friends, really good friends after that, and we hung out together all the time. (Davis interview 2014)

They would eventually form a group together, named Advent (after the popular audiophile speaker brand) when Lewis returned to Yale, in 1973, from a yearlong sabbatical in Chicago. The band consisted of Davis on piano, George Lewis on trombone, Hal Lewis on alto saxophone, Wes Brown on bass, and Gerry Hemingway on drums.

The two would continue a long musical relationship, with Lewis recording on Anthony Davis’ Hidden Voices (1979), Episteme (1981), and Hemispheres (1983), and Davis recording on Lewis’ Black Saint releases George Lewis (1978) and Homage to Charles Parker (1979).

During his time in New Haven Anthony Davis performed with a wide variety of musicians around town. He recalls that in addition to his experiences playing “avant-garde jazz” with Leo Smith, that he was playing with more “traditional people” like bebop saxophone legend Charles McPherson who lived in New Haven at the time (Davis interview 2014). All of these experiences would give Davis a solid background in a multiplicity of styles and conceptual approaches. These influences would inform Davis’ compositions during this
period and help him develop an original approach that drew from the entire
history of jazz and creative music.

iii. George Lewis

George Lewis was born in Chicago in 1952 and grew up in Chicago’s
Chatham neighborhood on the South Side (G. Lewis interviewed by Soltes
1997:6). His parents moved to Chicago during the Great Migration from the
South, an experience that Lewis asserts, “was seen to be a lot like crossing the
border... crossing the Iron Curtain” (ibid.) Lewis highlights the kind of situation
that his parents grew up in: “I don’t come from the sort of middle-class family.
When I go back to where my grandparents grew up and so on, [it’s] really highly
rural. Outdoor toilets and all of that. Not dirt poor, but not rich by any means”
(ibid.).

Although Lewis’ parents weren’t musicians, he recalls that his father “had
his different ideas about what the different styles in the music were,” and would
talk to Lewis in great detail about his favorite big band performances, remarking
on the intricacies of different arranging and performing styles. Lewis clarifies that
“this is when I had no interest in who these guys played like...I didn’t give a
damn. I was four years old!” (in Smith 1977:7). Not surprisingly, his father was
very proud when Lewis performed for a brief period with the Count Basie band
(ibid.).

Lewis was a precocious child, developing the ability to read at the age of
three, which he recalls made him stand out from his peers. He relates that it had
an “almost kind of a quasi-religious significance to it, sort of like being a strange spirit or being somehow just a little odd” (G. Lewis interviewed by Soltes 1997: 6). During his earliest years of elementary school, Lewis attended a local school, which he describes as highly disciplinarian and “an assault” on his creativity and sense of self. However, in 4th grade, a teacher who recognized his intellectual curiosity secured him a spot in the University of Chicago Laboratory School, (ibid. 11) a prestigious private school founded by educator John Dewey in 1896 (“The University of Chicago Laboratory School”).

Lewis, an avid reader, was excited that he was at a school that “finally had a real library” (G. Lewis interviewed by Soltes 1997:15). The Laboratory School was a much different environment than Lewis’ previous school, as he recalls it was attended by: “the children of professors and professional people and largely white. Largely, like maybe ninety-eight percent or something. So it’s a real different environment from the all-black school that I went to” (ibid. 12). In a 1977 interview Lewis is even more to the point, recalling that he went from “a situation where most of the kids don’t have any dough to a situation where most of the kids do” (Lewis in B. Smith 1977:3).

During his time at the Laboratory School, Lewis began to play the trombone at the suggestion of his parents. He recalls that they thought participating in the musical life of the school would help his social development. Lewis recalls that he “wasn’t particularly interested in playing a musical instrument. I wasn’t not interested. It just hadn’t occurred to me that it was something that I should be doing. I didn’t know anyone who did it” (G. Lewis

At the age of 9 Lewis began taking trombone lessons at the school with Frank Tirro, who would go on to become the Yale School of Music Dean and write the seminal jazz textbook, *Jazz: A History* (1977). The other student in this class was Ray Anderson, a trombonist who would become a master composer/improviser in his own right and perform with many of Lewis’ New Haven-era associates, including Anthony Davis and Gerry Hemingway. Lewis played in a wide variety of situations during his time at the Lab School, as he recalls: “There was orchestra and there was jazz band and there was concert band, and there were only two trombone players, Ray and me, so we played in all of them” (G. Lewis interviewed by Soltes 1997:17).

In 1969 he entered Yale University as a political science major, later switching his major to philosophy. In contrast to Anthony Davis’ involvement with student political life and socially conscious orientation, Lewis, who, at the time, was a classmate and future band mate of Davis, was not particularly active in radical politics. Lewis recounts:

> I was kind of a pretty sheltered person. I did my work and didn’t keep a lot of counsel with people. I had a few friends but basically kept to myself an awful lot, as much as you can in a dorm room where you live with all these people. I just tried to do my work and get some good grades. That was it.

(G. Lewis interviewed by Soltes 1997: 33)

After a period of disillusionment with his studies, during which Lewis “became so terribly bored that I had three papers to complete, did not complete a single one” (in B. Smith 1977:4), Lewis was forced to take a sabbatical year and reapply the next year. He would return to Chicago and become a member of the AACM on
hiatus as a student during 1971/72 school year. Lewis’ involvement with the AACM would introduce him to an Afrocentric approach to history and philosophy and become an important inspiration that allowed him to cultivate an “independent standpoint” in the face of what he considered an “authoritarian institution.”

going to Yale at that time, after having had that year away to experience the AACM people and get involved with that, it was really like having an independent standpoint, which is very important when facing one of those really strongly authoritarian institutions like an Ivy League university, where so much of what you do is designed to socialize you and to tell you who the rulers are, and maybe if you’re in the right group they prepare you to be a ruler yourself. (Lewis interviewed by Soltes 1997:50)

He also recounts that one of the lessons that he learned as an AACM member, was self-determination, a value that Smith embodied through his self-produced recordings for his Kabell imprint as well as his self-produced concerts.

the AACM is one of the crucial moments, I think, in my life because I think basically the AACM has this kind of philosophy of self-determination. The thing was, you had to assert yourself in order to do that. That was something I didn't do, and I think a lot of people hadn't done it. And so a group of people that were concerned with your development as an individual artist, and also with the development of the community and the development of the group of artists as well, that was a very important thing, (ibid.)

In addition to the values that he picked up as a member of the AACM more generally, Lewis credits AACM co-founder Muhal Richard Abrams with convincing him to go back to Yale and finish his degree in philosophy. Lewis explains the importance of Abrams guidance:
Learning about attitudes to deal with myself, learning about philosophy, he was the person who convinced me to go back to school and study philosophy because of his interest in philosophies of all different kinds. He was the person who encouraged me to go out and study other forms of music of whatever kind...my parents credit him with saving my life! (in B. Smith 1977:13)

After his year in Chicago, Lewis returned in the fall of 1972 with a book of music written by AACM artists that he had acquired during his time there. These compositions quickly entered the book for the collective group Advent and allowed the group to become familiar with a wide variety of AACM approaches to composition and improvisation. As Gerry Hemingway recalls:

By now it’s the first week of September, Labor Day has passed and in walks George Lewis. Who’s this guy? With a folder full of AACM tunes. And suddenly we’re playing, you know, Jarman tunes, and Muhal tunes and these tunes and those tunes, and we went right into it. It was great! (Hemingway interview 2014)

These compositions would introduce the musicians of Advent to the new approaches to composition and improvisation being developed by AACM artists, augmenting their studies with Leo Smith.

Although Lewis claims that he became involved with academic writing during his time as a professor at UCSD, his approach to scholarship is also rooted in experiences that he had much earlier in New Haven. Lewis explains that in 1980:

I had never seen any writing on improvisation before, but I had been doing my own writing on improvisation, and the only book I had seen by anyone writing on improvisation was Leo Smith’s book, which had come out earlier; it was very short. And so Leo Smith was actually living in New
Haven at the time I was a student, so I had a copy of his book, and—but the rest was all like trying to find little gems, little flowers among the weeds, looking and doing a lot of archaeology, and trying to find a theoretical grounding which I found in Husserl. (G. Lewis interviewed by Bendian 2013: 23)

The influence of Leo Smith’s work, particularly Notes (1973), is undeniably present in Lewis’ formulation of the concepts Afrological and Eurological in his now canonical 1996 article “Improvised Music after 1950.” Lewis’ dual interests in music and philosophy would continue to assert themselves, leading him to become an important voice as a composer and musicologist, investigating issues of improvisation, agency, and representation in both of these roles.

iv. Gerry Hemingway

Gerry Hemingway was born in 1955 in New Haven and grew up in Hamden, a near suburb of the city. The Hemingway family has deep roots in New Haven, and his father studied composition at Yale with Paul Hindemith before becoming a banker, which Hemingway describes as “the family business” (Hemingway interview 2014)

Hemingway recalls:

His father, his father’s father were all presidents of the 2nd New Haven National Bank. Important people, well the Hemingway family, I should back up even further and say that the Hemingway family has a fairly strong presence in New Haven history. If you go back to the very earliest strains of the history you will find the family. I am the 14th generation. There are not a whole lot of people who can claim to have 14 generations on the continent. So we go back pretty far, which is why I’m related to
Ernest Hemingway and many other Hemingways because we all share the same root tree structure. (ibid.) Hemingway’s family had diverse musical interests, and he attended many concerts at the New Haven Symphony with his grandmother, who had trained as a concert pianist. At age 10, Hemingway began playing drums. During his pre-teen years, Hemingway was primarily interested in the new sounds of psychedelic rock, and at the age of 12 he had the opportunity to witness one of his chief inspirations, Jimi Hendrix, live at Woolsey Hall in New Haven, a formative experience (Hemingway interview 2014).

At the age of 15, Hemingway began attending boarding school in New Jersey and by the age of 16, he would begin regularly commuting to the East Village to see groups perform at the Fillmore East, gradually becoming more interested in the sounds of the Mahavishnu Orchestra, and the groups of Larry Coryell, and Miles Davis. Hemingway recalls that their music had a similar energy to the psychedelic rock that had initially led him to start playing drums. Through his love of Larry Coryell’s music he was introduced to the scene at Slug’s, an important venue for cutting-edge jazz and creative music.

So it was going to see Larry Coryell at Slug’s that lead me to Slug’s and I went, ‘This is a cool place!’ And then I started showing up at Slug’s and I didn’t know who any of these people were. ‘Who’s Lee Morgan? Never heard of him.’ You know? So I’d just show up and go. (Hemingway interview 2014)

Hemingway remembers going to see Elvin Jones’ quartet with Steve Grossman and Dave Liebman, a particularly inspiring show.

Killing! I mean, burning down the house. Of course I was there on account
of Elvin, but I didn’t forget Liebman, he was also quite...or Grossman, they were all really amazing to me. And I would sit in the front row, literally Elvin Jones’ sweat would be flung onto my face. I was that close to the music! (ibid.)

In addition to seeing live music on a regular basis, Hemingway began to read some of the seminal writings on contemporary jazz and creative music.

I found out a lot about this music from my library...They had a book sale one time; there I bought Black Music, and Four Lives [in Black Music], the famous books by A.B. Spellman and LeRoi Jones or Amiri Baraka. And I read ‘em and they were really interesting to me, and then on top of that they had evidently subscribed to Down Beat magazine and I started reading it. (Hemingway interview 2014)

From Down Beat, he learned about the music of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, eventually purchasing key records from their early period through mail order ads:

they had a review of Les Stances a Sophie and People in Sorrow and the review was like...I said, I have to have these records, these records sound so incredible. And I wrote Chuck Nessa directly, because at that time it was just his address at the bottom and I wrote him a letter and I said, ‘Can I buy these records?’ And he wrote me back a letter and he said, ‘Yes, just send me this check to this amount and I’ll send them to you.’ And I got them, and there I was at school listening to People in Sorrow. (ibid.)

Because of his inquisitive nature, and access to live performances and recordings, even more than the others in his cohort, Hemingway was already familiar with the output of the artists of the AACM at an early age. Anthony Davis recalls his first meeting with Gerry Hemingway after responding to an ad that Hemingway placed in Rolling Stone:

So we pull up, and it’s in the back of the woods, it’s in Mount Carmel with a swimming pool. It turns out to be Gerry Hemingway....He had this long
hair and he had the complete collection of all the AACM records. Wow, who is this cat who has all of Roscoe Mitchell’s records? (Davis interview 2014)

Hemingway, who was 17 at the time, believes that Davis was actually more impressed with his record collection, which at the time included Smith’s *Creative Music—1* (1972), than his playing; Davis’ description of the event 40 years later may lend some credence to this observation. Nevertheless, after this initial meeting Hemingway and Davis continued to play sessions and would begin performing together. They became fast friends and frequently spent time together listening to music at Davis’ apartment.

Hemingway had his initial encounter with Leo Smith not long after his first performance with Davis, a few weeks after their initial session.

We played this gig and Leo was at the gig, and I met him for the first time. Tony [Anthony Davis] introduced me to him and probably mentioned that I had his record. And then I met, I think a day later I’m at Tony’s apartment again and that’s when Leo shows up and we talk some more. And I started going to Leo’s house fairly soon after that. I don’t remember exactly when but I went to go visit him and Leo would sit me down and we’d listen to Harry Partch together . . . King Oliver was a big subject for him at that time and so we checked out King Oliver. We would run into each other all the time at Cutler’s Record Store. (Hemingway interview 2014)

Like Davis, Hemingway would end up spending a lot of time with Smith, listening to records with him and absorbing his philosophies.

I have to say at that time, being young and very impressionable and very enamored with Leo in particular, I adopted a lot of his terminology and his philosophy. And I kind of wore his coat for a while in terms of how I
positioned my own opinion about musical things. . . . I think I was already a very wide-minded listener. [Anthony Davis] will agree with that point. Tony refers to me as the ‘omnivorous listener.’ That’s the words that he’s used. I listened to everything. And Leo was . . . we found a simpatico and an alignment there very much. I mean, he certainly opened me up to many things for the first time. So I owe so many debts to him, actually. (ibid.)

Hemingway relates the continued importance of Smith’s philosophy of creation of a music that incorporates influences and musicians from diverse world traditions:

He said, you know there’s all this great music all over the world and he was also proposing this kind of universal music, bringing all these things together, even back then. Yeah, this is one principle that he’s stayed with all his life. He really felt compelled in this direction of making music with all kinds of musicians and he always had that vision. Anyways, we would study and listen to these musics together, talk about them, and he would eventually, when he started producing scores and little pieces...As time went on I started studying the mrdangam at Wesleyan University and I would bring that and we would play around with that some. (ibid.)

Hemingway also describes his introduction through Smith to various world musics as a teenager:

He was also turning me onto the Peking Opera, so he kind of opened the door...and the Burundi, the famous Burundi record, which was the Central African record on Ocora that’s remained popular all these years. So he was my door to the world music thing in a way (ibid.)

Smith was also an influence on Hemingway’s series of solo concerts performed between 1974 and 1977 (Lock 1988: 255) which, reflecting Smith’s Ellington dedication on Reflectactivity (1975), were dedicated to drummers who Hemingway felt were important to the history of the American drum set. His 4th
concert, performed at the Educational Center for the Arts in New Haven in ’77, was dedicated to Tony Williams and featured Hemingway playing many objects that he found in the trash, including a huge barrel that he rolled around in for both visual and sonic effect. This concert, in particular, is indicative of the myriad eclectic influences on his solo music, which he performed in part to “individuate himself” from the rest of his cohort. Hemingway explains that the concert was inspired by the writings of Carlos Castañeda, Smith’s solo performances on his homemade constructions, and a general AACM interest in found objects being utilized as idiophones (i.e. Henry Threadgill’s Hubkaphone, created from found automobile. hub-caps) (Hemingway interview 2014).

Hemingway also studied for a year at Berklee College of Music, during which he began studying with Alan Dawson, a legendary drummer and instructor from the Boston area.12 Dawson, who played with Dave Brubeck, Jaki Byard, and a host of others (“Featured Musician–Alan Dawson”), is perhaps best known for his mentorship of Tony Williams. Although he enjoyed his lessons with Dawson, Hemingway ultimately dropped out after one semester, finding the school a poor fit for his interests. After returning to New Haven, in addition to his studies at Wesleyan, he also audited classes at Yale, meeting a diverse crew of young musicians, including saxophonist/Yale instructor David Mott, saxophonist/composer Jane Ira Bloom and theorist/composer Robert D. Morris, who “did these kind of wild, Cageian, Marcel Duchamp kind of events at Yale” (Hemingway interview 2014).

12 Hemingway would continue studying with Dawson, regularly making the trek up to Boston from New Haven (Hemingway interview 2014).
Smith’s philosophy of individual self-determination was also a vital influence on Hemingway. Of all of the younger musicians profiled in this chapter, he is one of the few to begin his own record label during this period. In 1978 Hemingway founded Auricle records to release *Kwambe* (1978), an album influenced by his studies with Ghanaian master drummer Abraham Adzenyah and drummer/dancer Freeman Donkor, featuring Jay Hoggard and Anthony Davis. The label has over 15 releases to date, including the 2016 album *The Long Road*, recorded with his long-time trio, BassDrumBone featuring fellow New Haven scene bassist Mark Helias and trombonist Ray Anderson.

v. Pheeroan akLaff

Pheeroan akLaff, born Paul Maddox in 1955 in Detroit, MI, hails from a musical family. During his childhood, his older brother studied classical piano at Cass Tech, a school with a significant musical history, and his parents were interested in a wide range of music. As akLaff recalls in a 1982 interview for *Coda*, “I heard the music of people like Monk, Clifford Brown and Max Roach from my father and the music of Chopin and Beethoven from my mother” (in Riggins 1982:8). In addition to the recordings that his parents exposed him to, listening to his brother practice on the family piano heightened akLaff’s interest in music.

My brother’s being a virtuoso pianist at ten certainly helped me and all of us enjoy music. So, he was the super prodigy piano playing dude and we all had lessons from time to time. So that was a normal thing that people did in those days. Students would have lessons, even if they were from
working class families. (akLaff interview 2014)

akLaff recalls that he used to play rhythms on anything that he could get his hands on as a child (in Riggins 1982:8), and was inspired to play drum set by Max Roach’s work on *Study in Brown* (1955). He remembers: “It just happened one day that I picked it up and really listened and that actually made me want to play drums...I had a little snare drum when I was a child—but it was through the inspiration of that record that I really got seriously involved with playing drums” (ibid. 8).

akLaff, who displays considerable technique on his early recordings, studied drums from the age of 15, including with Motown legend Richard “Pistol” Allen (akLaff—“About”) but downplays his training, stating:

> I had lessons with really great people, but I didn’t concentrate much on that, I just sort of drifted into college, and drifted out of and found out that I really did want to be a musician after all. All the other things that were percolating just peeped out. (akLaff interview 2014)

He also had considerable experience playing with local R&B groups in Detroit, something that would give him a skill set lacking in many other drummers active in the avant-garde during that period. akLaff’s first recording, at the age of 18 was with R&B singer Major Lasky, and he also performed with local jazz-funk legend Travis Biggs, who encouraged him to bring his drums with him to college (akLaff interview 2014). Enrolled at Eastern Michigan University from 1972-74, akLaff studied speech and drama before leaving for New Haven (Kernfeld, “Pheeroan akLaff”).

akLaff wanted to move to New York to study with Rashied Ali (akLaff interview 2014), but took the opportunity to move within close proximity of the
city when his friend, saxophonist Dwight Andrews was accepted to Yale Divinity School. Soon after arriving in New Haven, in 1975, akLaff would meet Leo Smith, beginning a 40 year (and counting) musical relationship. Unlike other members of the New Haven cohort, akLaff was completely unfamiliar with Smith’s music before their first auspicious meeting. He describes the socially conscious nature of the Yale and New Haven communities in the 1970s, and his first chance meeting with Smith.

This was outdoors on the campus and students were giving talks and bands were playing because they wanted to speak out against [the] gene theories of Shockley and I guess others who were...you know students are always trying to make sure that people don’t take the wrong intellectual turn...a turn for the worse, you know! Especially during the 70s. So we were playing outdoors, Wadada’s band was playing, Davis was in the band, and I said ‘wow, you know, I really enjoy your music.’ and this was the first time that I had met him. (akLaff interview 2014)

akLaff’s relationship with Smith was forged primarily through rehearsals and on the bandstand. When asked if he would ever socialize with Smith off the bandstand, akLaff replied:

No, no, not at all. Never. Our exchanges at that time were more like when people today go to yoga. We’d go and hit ...that’s it. That’s the fix for the meditation needed for the week, and for everything else we’d go about doing whatever we were doing in society. We were all really busy young people in the 70s. Do you realize there was a gas crisis in the 70s! (laughs) There, was a degree to which there was no time to socialize, or do anything other than what was work, especially people with kids! Shoot, there was no time for socialization. We were lucky if we could get to the bandstand. (ibid.)

Despite their more limited social encounters, akLaff’s encounters with Smith, if
anything, seem equally, if not more, memorable, because of their non-verbal nature. akLaff also studied at Yale informally, including auditing a course taught by Afro-diasporic art historian Robert Farris Thompson (akLaff interview 2014).

Although he claims to have been far too busy to study any traditional world musics during the time that he was in Connecticut, akLaff had already familiarized himself with music from a variety of traditions while he was still in college at Eastern Michigan. When asked what kind of world traditions he was familiar with at the time, he recalls:

Hugh Masekela, of course, Olatunji, yeah other than that it would have been just Folkways kind of stuff…the typical anthropological recordings that you could find in the library…all I did in my little time in school was take records out of the library in the international music section…Of course, (with) the African ones I could figure out rhythms that I could use. But of course gagaku or noh or Tibetan or all those Indonesian ones, its like: ‘Oh wait a minute. I think this is going to require a different listening.’ (akLaff interview 2014)

In addition to his world music listening, akLaff had also learned a fair amount of African and Afro-Caribbean drumming patterns during informal study in both Detroit and New Haven (akLaff interview 2014). Beyond the R&B and more avant-garde music that he performed during this period, he also played more traditional jazz, subbing for Ed Blackwell in Wesleyan professor Bill Barron’s group for what he considers his “first professional jazz gig.” akLaff would put all of these influences to good use performing in the groups of Anthony Davis, Oliver Lake, and Leo Smith in the coming years, recording on many influential albums.
vi. Michael Gregory Jackson

Guitarist/composer Michael Gregory Jackson (b. 1953) grew up in Hamden, in the New Haven area (as did Gerry Hemingway). His early musical activities revolved around performing in a variety of Hamden and New Haven area coffee shops, both as a solo performer and with rock and blues bands, beginning at age 13 (Jackson interview 2017). At the age of 16, after sitting in a few times, he became a part of the house band at The Talk of the Town, an organ jazz club that was on Dixwell Avenue, an area with a thriving jazz scene dating back to the 1940s (Jackson interview 2017, Doherty 2011). The club also hosted a jam session that Gerry Hemingway and Jane Ira Bloom used to attend (Hemingway interview 2014).

Jackson had eclectic tastes in music that he would indulge by taking weekly trips to Cutler’s, the same New Haven record store where Hemingway would often run into Leo Smith.

I had been a listener of all kinds of music for my teen years. There was a record store in New Haven called Cutler’s...every week I would buy two records just by the cover alone. So one week I’d get Tauhid by Pharaoh Sanders and [the psychedelic rock group] Blue Cheer the next week I’d get gamelan music and Stockhausen. So that’s what I grew up listening to, all sorts of music. (Jackson interview 2017)

He was also an avid listener of music from around the world. Like akLaff, he acquired the majority of his knowledge of different world traditions from records and cassettes that were available at his local library (Jackson interview 2017).

At the age of 16 Jackson met Leo Smith, performing with Smith and
absorbing many of his ideas. Jackson recalls that most of the music they performed was in his “rhythm unit” notation, a system that looks like traditional notation but is interpreted according to Smith’s original precepts. Jackson moved out of New Haven after high school, settling in Boston from 1971-1975. During this period he put together groups with unusual instrumentation that allowed him to write music utilizing his diverse interests. He recalls that he “had bands with a lot of people from [New England] Conservatory. So I had bands with oboes and cellos” (Jackson 2017). He also reconnected with Wadada Leo Smith in 1975 during a performance in Boston that included Oliver Lake, an experience that would start a long partnership between Jackson and Lake, an association captured on the Wildflowers (1976) sessions a year later.

While Jackson relates that he doesn’t use any of Smith’s concepts in his writing, he was profoundly influenced by Smith’s encouragement early in his musical development to cultivate an original style.

You know, the thing for Wadada and me, when I met him I was very young, so I would say that the thing that I got from him was that he always encouraged me to be myself and that was the big thing for me, because I did just that. I felt very empowered to do whatever I thought of doing. I was into a lot of different things, I was into rock music, and I was into the blues, I was into whatever. I just felt compelled to follow whatever I was feeling at the moment and that could be anything. Just playing quartet...to a rock band, funk band, whatever. I just love music, and what I write was always for sure influenced by my openness and just being able to access melody and concepts. (ibid.)

This ability to incorporate a multiplicity of influences, while still being grounded in an original melodicism, is one of the virtues that Stanley Crouch (b. 1945)
praises in the liner notes to Jackson’s debut album *Clarity* (1977). Crouch writes:

Maybe Michael Gregory Jackson’s love of melody has to do with the fact that he is a singer who possesses a soft, clear voice that can bend at the edges, or that he is a guitarist whose lines search for a song, being as often pensive as dancing. More probably it has to do with the influences he cites: Ellington, Leo Smith, Eric Dolphy, Hendrix, Wonder, Mahalia Jackson, Son House, Ornette Coleman. The thing that draws all of these musicians together is a consistent concern for melody, color and rhythmic drive as well as subtlety. But what makes a young 23-year-old Mr. Jackson important is his ability to focus all of these influences at such an early age. (Crouch 1977)

**vii. Jay Hoggard**

Jay Hoggard was born in 1954, spending his earliest years in Washington, D.C. before his family moved to Mt. Vernon, a northern suburb of New York City in 1960. During the time that Hoggard lived in Mt. Vernon, he spent a considerable amount of time in NYC. His father, a minister, was the pastor of Mother AME Zion church in Harlem. His mother, originally from Pittsburgh, played piano in the distinct regional style of that city.

[My mother] went to high school with Errol Garner, and [she] played in a style on the piano...it was years later before I realized that her voicings were the exact same voicings as Errol Garner. She could play in a block style...that was exactly like Errol Garner’s. I just thought that that was the way my mother played the piano. (Hoggard interview 2014)

From an early age he studied piano with his mother, and also briefly played saxophone (Wild and Kernfield, “Hoggard, Jay”). Despite being surrounded by music, the music that his family listened to “was all church” (Hoggard interview
In contrast to Anthony Davis, whose time at Yale “coincide(d) with [his] self-discovery as a black person,” and George Lewis, whose introduction to Afrocentric history was through the AACM, Hoggard recalls that growing up in his family he had always had some sense of the connection between Africans on the continent and in diaspora:

from 1952 to 1972, I was born in ’54, my father was the director of the overseas missions department, which meant he made his first trip to Ghana and Nigeria in 1957 when I was three. So, from 3 years old, we had visitors in our house...and that was in DC...and then we moved to Mount Vernon in 1960. We had visitors in our home from Ghana and Nigeria, every year, two or three times a year. So I assumed everybody knew about Africa and the connection between Africa and African Americans. It was well into high school that I learned that that was not the case. (Hoggard interview 2014)

In 9th grade Hoggard had an experience that would influence his musical direction. With some free time in Harlem, down the street from his father’s church, he happened upon a recording of traditional xylophone music from Gabon.

there was a record store, called African Record Store....I went in there one time when I was in ninth grade, just ‘cause I was in the neighborhood and I was interested in records, and I was interested in Motown. So I went in there, and it was all African records, and these cats were playing some xylophone and I was like what is that? It was from Gabon. (Hoggard interview 2014)

Hoggard started playing vibraphone in 10th grade, ostensibly influenced by his discovery of traditional xylophone music (a subject he would remain
interested in, writing his Wesleyan MA thesis on the topic in 1992). He quickly fell in love with jazz, remarking that he began listening to Coltrane in 11\textsuperscript{th} grade, delving more deeply into Coltrane’s music during his senior year.

Hoggard attended Wesleyan from 1972-1976 as an undergraduate, originally enrolling as a philosophy major, before deciding to devote his time to ethnomusicological study (Wild and Kernfeld, “Jay Hoggard”). He was also introduced, first hand, to the newest sounds in creative music through Wesleyan Visiting Instructors Sam Rivers, Ed Blackwell, Jimmy Garrison and Clifford Thornton (Hoggard interview 2014).

Hoggard, who already possessed prodigious technique and an original concept, was quickly conscripted by Thornton to become a member of his ensemble. Hoggard performed with Clifford Thornton as a freshman, making his recording debut on \textit{Communications Network} (1972). He also, through Thornton, found opportunities to play with more established musicians including Sun Ra drummer Clifford Jarvis, and “up in Massachusetts at the Music Inn [with] Randy Weston” (Hoggard interview 2014). Hoggard describes his musical education at Wesleyan as a cross between academic and street learning: “I did both. Blackwell used to say, ‘you don’t learn nothin’ from no book.’ ‘Cause he was not from that, he learned it from the streets of New Orleans. So, yeah, that spot between, I was at the tail end of those guys, the school of hard knocks, learning from them” (Hoggard interview 2014). In 1973, he toured Europe with Jimmy Garrison and Clifford Thornton, an experience that gave him a taste of what it was to be a professional touring musician.
Hoggard eventually met Anthony Davis through fellow Wesleyan student, Wes Brown, and began an association with Davis, which would continue into the 1980s. Their duo collaboration *Under the Double Moon*, and the Anthony Davis-led quartet record *Song for the Old World* (1978) are particularly outstanding documents of their fruitful musical relationship.

Despite the largely Eurocentric nature of much of Yale’s curriculum, the musicians of the New Haven cohort were able to cultivate a vital creative music scene in the area, with many of them meeting during events held at the university. As Travis Jackson notes, jazz schools and conservatories “now serve as primary places where alliances are formed among young musicians” (Jackson 2012:85). Just as these institutions have taken on the function of creating early connections between young musicians, Yale and Wesleyan Universities became the primary locales where this group of young musicians formed partnerships that, in many cases, would last until the present day.

In this chapter, I look at these musicians and the circumstances of their formative years in New Haven, exploring their engagement with the changing political landscape as a window into their early development. I also explore how these young musicians, and older mentors like Leo Smith, developed a thriving community dedicated to musical experimentation influenced by their study of a variety of different experimental approaches and study of world traditions. I examine the intercultural music making that was taking place during this period at Wesleyan University, and the influence of these intercultural collaborations on the composer/improvisers of the New Haven cohort. I go on to look at the creation of the Creative Music Improvisors Forum organization, which was an important outlet for Gerry Hemingway, Dwight Andrews and other musicians active in this scene to perform their original music. In addition to the performance opportunities that these young musicians were able to cultivate in
Connecticut, they also interacted with a thriving loft scene in lower Manhattan. This NYC scene was beginning to show increased diversity and vitality with the arrival of many musicians active in the Midwestern and West Coast collectives. In addition to the more experimental musics that these composer/improvisers were in the process of developing, I look at their engagement with contemporary Afro-diasporic popular musics.

**Panthermania and Radical Politics**

In early 1971, Lewis and Davis would meet Leo Smith, who had recently arrived in New Haven (from a brief period spent in Europe) at the suggestion of his new friend and musical partner Marion Brown. 1969 and 1970 were turbulent years worldwide, but were especially fraught in New Haven. 1970 was the year of the Bobby Seale trial in New Haven. Seale was being tried for conspiracy to murder Alex Rackley, who was believed to be an FBI informant. Seale’s trial caused a series of protests on the New Haven Green “as anti-government activists, supporters of the Panthers and others converged on the city” (Shelton 2014). One of the most memorable and consequential of these protests was the “May Day rally” on May 1, 1970, an event for which Davis composed a piece entitled “May Day” to commemorate (Shelton 2014, Davis interviewed by Brown 1982:14). The May Day rally in particular would become a memorable event in New Haven history; a contemporary account describes the atmosphere:

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53 Smith met Brown during a performance in Amherst months before deciding to settle in New Haven (Smith interviewed by Bynum, 2011a).
Unforgettable. A bizarre coalition of Panthers, black residents and Kingman Brewster, leading Yale’s liberal elite, had saved the day. The Yale rally went down as a good political festival, just as Woodstock was the only good rock festival (Sheehy 1970: 61)

Davis, who was active in left-wing politics and became a monitor for the Black Panthers, describes the scene at Yale during his freshman year,

my first year at Yale, Yale was closed down...So I helped with monitoring the demonstrations, to make sure...so that people wouldn’t get hurt. So I met Abbie Hoffman, and Jerry Rubin. It was a very interesting period...They brought in the National Guard in New Haven, and that was very scary because, there could be.... the potential for confrontation with the National Guard....So that was a very wild period in time to be a student at Yale. (Davis interview 2014)

The Black Panther rallies would also make a lasting impact on Gerry Hemingway, who was in 8th grade during the Bobby Seale trial. One of his early artistic achievements was a short film documenting the events of the period, filming several Black Panther rallies that Davis, then beginning his studies at Yale, was ostensibly part of.

Davis’ statements about the time period highlight the engagement of a vast swath of left-wing organizations with the Seale trial. Hemingway also admits that his radical politics, influenced by members of his family, particularly his brother, oriented him towards an engagement with radical black politics, even though he had very little idea at the time of why the Black Panthers were rallying (Hemingway interview 2014).

The Black Panther protests also had an impact on George Lewis, then a member of the politically connected Skull and Bones secret society (Lewis
interviewed by Soltes 1997), who “had a big plan to study political science” and would “go on to law school and make some money or something like that” (in B. Smith 1977:4). Lewis recalls: “My first year in school they had a big student strike, with thousands of people running through the streets demonstrating for various things like ‘Free Bobby Seale’ and all this sort of stuff. So I gave up trying to be a lawyer, that got to be a drag” (ibid.).

While Davis was involved with the Panthers, it is important to keep in mind what that might have meant in the late 1960s and early 70s for an African American student at an Ivy League University. Some writers have attempted to characterize the sounds of avant-garde African American improvised music in the late 1960s as a sonic black nationalism. Kofsky’s book Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music (1970) and Free Jazz/Black Power (1971) by Phillipe Carles and Jean-Louis Comoli are some prominent examples. Furthermore, individual expressions of black nationalist and Pan-African sentiment have frequently been misunderstood and mischaracterized by critics and scholars. Ingrid Monson takes a more nuanced approach than earlier writers, highlighting the fact that engagement with radical black political organizations took many forms. Monson writes:

Black nationalism (and black radicalism more broadly) has also been more variegated than popular understandings convey. According to Dawson, the key components of black nationalism since the time of Martin Delaney have placed an emphasis on black autonomy and varying levels of economic, social, and political separation from white Americans...separatism, nevertheless has not been the defining issue for black nationalism. More widely supported aspects of black nationalism
include economic self-determination, cultural self-definition, and the development of autonomous black-led organizations. In the twentieth-century, black nationalism emphasized the place of Africa as a historical, cultural and spiritual homeland. (Monson 2010: 17)

Marion Brown, who was teaching an Afrocentric curriculum in New Haven elementary schools during this period (the early 1970s), explains how black nationalism and Afrocentricity, in particular, were misunderstood, both in the US and abroad. Illustrating how many people misconstrued the pursuits of self-determination and Afrocentric cultural enrichment as an antagonistic relationship to European and Euro-American culture, Brown writes:

> when information would come to Europe from the United States, it would get so distorted that people would get a totally wrong image of what happened in the Sixties and 1970. I worked in New Haven. I worked in very poor schools. I worked in the ghetto. And what I taught the children was how to make instruments out of nothing. How to take an old can, an old box and make a musical instrument, play these things. European people, at one point, they were saying that people like myself and others, that we would teach people to hate people. (Brown 1983:204)

While many of the musicians profiled in this chapter were influenced by their engagement with radical politics, it is also important to separate their various musical projects from their political views and statements. Especially considering the breadth of the work of an artist like Smith or Davis and their diverse influences, an analysis of their work that primarily focuses on the relationship between their personal politics and their compositions/improvisations is doomed to be highly reductive. Wadada Leo Smith criticizes an attempt to reduce his music to a simplistic political statement
in an interview in the collection *People Get Ready* (ed. Heble 2013). In response to a question about the music of the AACM, where an audience member asks: 

“Did the music itself have political or social meaning? Maybe musical freedom representing some sort of political freedom?” Smith replies:

How are you gonna separate that? You cannot separate it...everybody in the AACM is political. And everybody that is sitting out here in chairs or standing, breathing, and pumping hot blood through their body is also political. You can’t really ask a question like How did you become political?...Everybody drinks the same water, OK, and being political is something like getting up in the morning, brushing your teeth, gargling, and then, afterwards, drinking a glass of water. It is part of your normal life. You don’t have to make your music something, you know. Your music is...Every piece of music that a person produces, whether it is understood or not, says exactly what it means to live in a society and be a part of that society. Was that society some place that they feel that they need to change everything in order to get everything to be right and equal...? (in Ewart et al. 2013:259)

Smith’s response highlights the holistic nature of both music and politics as well as the problematic nature of trying to define the totality of an artist’s music by focusing on one aspect of that artist’s life.

In his self-published *Notes (8 Pieces)* (1973), Leo Smith describes his feelings of antipathy towards agents of the dominant white power structure such as the heads of record labels and critics. However, he would develop close personal relationships with white musicians such Hemingway and Bobby Naughton (a peer of Smith’s who also had his own record label), who would become half of the governing body of the original Creative Music Improvisers Forum (Hemingway interview 2014).
These interpersonal relationships show Smith’s embrace of certain white musicians and rejection of black separatist ideologies. Although the AACM, founded in Chicago in 1965 was an all black organization, in 1970s New Haven, the geographic and temporal realities would dictate that Smith, who was interested in creating a universal musical expression, would bring musicians of any race and ethnicity into the fold.

**Willie Ruff’s “Conservatory Without Walls”**

George Lewis recalls that during his time at Yale, “There were only six or seven people in the whole school that were interested in this kind of music, out of the whole population and they were constantly being shit on by everybody” (Lewis in B. Smith 1977:4). According to many of my interviewees, Yale had little institutional interest in any music outside of the Western canon (Hoggard interview 2014). However, french hornist/bassist and Yale Professor Willie Ruff (b. 1931), along with his partner, pianist Dwike Mitchell (1930-2013), was able to cultivate a vibrant jazz and creative music scene by bringing in established artists and legends, including Duke Ellington, Max Roach and Charles Mingus through his “Conservatory Without Walls” series. Anthony Davis recounts meeting Ellington and the impact that it had on him.

that was a big moment for me because I remember...I had this huge afro...So I went to the reception for Duke after he had done this concert. He actually did this epic thing with Willie ‘The Lion’ Smith (who) had shown up. They did a four hand part of it . . . So I came back to them for the reception and I was a freshman at Yale, and I had a huge afro. So, Duke Ellington was just greeting people and I was shy and I was just standing at
the back of the room. He looked across the room and saw me and my hair and said, pointing, ‘you must be a musician, come over here!’. Boom, and then I was spending the evening hanging out with Duke Ellington. (Davis interview 2014)

George Lewis also remembers the significance that these concerts held for him as a young student, citing a diverse line-up of artists.

they brought [Charles] Mingus and they brought Slam Stewart, and then there was Willie's compatriot-colleague, Dwike Mitchell, and I remember meeting Tony Williams and, boy, William Warfield, Dizzy Gillespie. There were all these people that came through. Willie ‘the Lion’ Smith, Max Roach. It was incredible. (G. Lewis interviewed by Soltes 1997: 29)

The jam sessions that followed these concerts, like the one during which Davis and Lewis met were also formative experiences for these young musicians.

George Lewis remembers getting the chance to sit in with Archie Shepp and his group.

Archie Shepp came to the campus. He brought Alan Silva and Byard Lancaster and all those guys. I was playing with Alan not too long ago, and I said, ‘Remember when you guys came to Yale?’ He said, ‘Well, yeah, man. These kids, man, came and played with us.’ ‘Well, that was us, man.’ [laughter] ‘No!!’ [laughter] It was so weird. (ibid.:37)

The concerts that Ruff presented also created opportunities for these talented young musicians to perform in an informal situation with seasoned veterans. In many cases these situations would lead to friendships and sometimes collaborations, Hemingway remembers:

Dizzy Gillespie was their regular, Willie Ruff and Dwike Mitchell brought Dizzy up all the time. It felt like we were all friends with this guy, we knew him, we hung out with him all the time. (Hemingway interview 2014)

He also recalls that guitarist Ed Cherry (b.1954), a New Haven native and long
time collaborator of Pheeroan akLaff, was asked to join Gillespie’s band shortly after meeting him (Hemingway interview 2014). In the absence of any real dedication to teaching jazz and creative music at Yale, “The Conservatory Without Walls” program gave these young musicians a unique opportunity to interact with masters of jazz and creative music. Beyond the influence of Leo Smith and Marion Brown, this program was a vital part of creating a participatory atmosphere where these young experimentalists were empowered to feel that they were part of a great and living tradition.

As George Lewis writes, “Ultimately, Ruff’s ‘Conservatory Without Walls’ is a hopeful metaphor that expresses the need to transgress and ultimately to do away with those borders that promote exclusion, nonpermeability and nonexchange” (G. Lewis 2000:91).

**Mambo Minkisi**

Pheeroan akLaff also had a particularly memorable experience as a concertgoer at Yale. He describes the serendipitous circumstances that would lead to him meeting one of his idols, Rashied Ali (1933-2009), who was a member of Coltrane’s group from late 1965 through 1967. Although the majority of the concerts at Yale were organized by Willie Ruff (and his partner in the Ruff-Mitchell Duo, pianist Dwike Mitchell), this particular concert was produced by historian of African and Afro-diasporic art, Robert Farris Thompson (b. 1932).

I wanted to go to New York and find Rashied Ali and study with Rashied Ali. So when I got to New Haven, just right there on my twentieth birthday...yeah, it was my twentieth birthday, it was a full moon so I’m all
excited and Dwight [Andrews] has just pretty much opened all the doors to all these great things.... I met great people, including other people that would find themselves there. Of course, the one class that I audited (at Yale) briefly was an African studies class with maestro...papá... Robert Farris Thompson was at that time making sure that people had a chance to hear some music...so he brought Rashied Ali’s quartet to Yale. (akLaff interview 2014)

Author of such seminal works exploring African retentions in the New World as *Flash of The Spirit* (1983), Thompson’s interest in Rashied Ali seemed typical of the kind of atmosphere of interdisciplinary interest in African and diasporic culture that Anthony Davis’ father, Charles T. Davis (1918-1981), would foster through his leadership of the African American studies program beginning in 1972. Pheeroan akLaff, who would meet both Thompson and then graduate student Henry Louis Gates, remembers Charles Davis and his experiences around Yale fondly:

> I was able to meet all of those great scholars there, because Mr. Davis was such a brilliant man and very much a father figure to us at that time.

(ibid.)

The African American studies program became an important center for the creation of pan-African scholarship epitomized by the work of Thompson, and later Gates. In addition to a center for scholarship, it was also, according to akLaff, an important meeting place for young intellectually and creatively-oriented African American students. In fact, akLaff, although not officially a student, would be welcomed into the Davis’ home after simply introducing himself (ibid.)

Robert Farris Thompson was an influential member of this community and
he was an avid enthusiast of the new “creative black music” of the 1970s. Thompson (1975) wrote poetically about the music, and “Mambo Minkisi,” an article on Leo Smith and his “manifesto-poem” notes (8 pieces) (1973), is a fascinating document. Thompson uses his research on African and Afro-diasporic creativity to contextualize Smith’s music and ground it in a larger historical context. Thompson writes: “I read and reread this precious text and found myself transported back to Haiti when a black priest of vodun near Leogane dealt me spades from a pack of Western playing cards. Only it wasn’t spades. The cards were code. It was Erzulie, goddess of love, a sign of love” (Thompson 1975:11). Thompson goes on to say: “This is where Leo Smith comes in, the healing words of the medicines of God” (ibid.).

While casting Smith as a Mambo/Houngan may appear to be of a piece with the exoticized representations of AACM members, which Radano (1993:244-246) addresses in relation to Anthony Braxton in New Musical Figurations, Thompson uncovers a crucial aspect of Smith’s musical practice and concept: communicating through codes and symbols. Smith himself has spent a great deal of his career cultivating music that is realized through symbolic logic, a logic which was inspired by his own research on African and Afro-diasporic symbolic thought. Smith explains that one of the experiences that led to the genesis of his symbolic Ankhrasmation system was his being introduced to Marcel Griaule’s landmark book, Conversations with Ogotemelli. Smith says of Ogotemelli:

Well, I learned from him, from his ideas about symbolic language. He was talking to the Frenchman about the celestial granary coming down from the third star of Sirius. Not the one that everybody points to, but the
number three, because there are three stars of Sirius, three planets, ok? And he was talking about that...his people had come from there, and that they came there on what he called a celestial granary, where on top of it there was a smith hammering out all the directions, North, East, South, and West, and that each coordinate point, North, East, South, and West had a set of stairs. And that these set of stairs all descended down the side of the granary and that when it landed it had all kinds of elements on it. And so the Frenchman was asking Ogotemmeli what was on one of the stairs. Ogotemmeli told him that on this one step there were so many things, he named some of them and the guy got confused. He said, ‘Well, how can so many things be on one step?’, He said, ‘Well, when they’re symbols, their number can be infinite.’ (Smith interview 2015)

Thompson interprets the music of Smith through his own larger project of investigating African retentions in New World creativity, focusing on African retentions of Smith’s music and philosophy, very much in line with Flash of The Spirit (Thompson 1983) and what is perhaps his best-known work, An Aesthetic of the Cool (Thompson 1973). In fact, Smith and Thompson were friendly and would speak about their shared interest in African art and culture on occasion.

Smith recalls:

We became friends and we talked about a lot of things related to art and the African connection. His book, African Art in Motion, which I think is a very important document which shows a lot about art and dance and music and philosophy being inseparable. Those four components are ever-present in African music or African performance would be a better word. So I had many beautiful conversations with him and he also did, like you say, that profile on me in...Coda Magazine, which was really a pretty scholarly effort on his part. (Smith interview 2015)

Thompson makes further parallels between improvisation in creative music
and Afro-diasporic religion, arguing that acquiring the ability to express one’s creative spirit has a close parallel in Afro-Caribbean religious practices. Thompson writes: “The highest levels of spirit possession in black religion compare, I think, with the highest manifestations of improvisation in creative black music” (1975:12).

**Influence of World Music Performing Ensembles**

In the late 1960s and early 1970s Wesleyan would create and dramatically enlarge their world music program. In addition to the increased availability of recordings from different world cultures with the founding of record labels like Folkways, OCORA, and Nonesuch Explorer, study with actual masters of the tradition would prove instrumental in many of these young musicians’ development. In *Subcultural Sounds* (1993), Mark Slobin makes an insightful comparison between live music and recorded music in diasporic contexts. Using a cooking metaphor, Slobin touts the importance of live music, explaining that in many situations live music has a “different meaning as cultural nourishment, akin to preparing dishes from fresh ingredients instead of eating out of a can” (Slobin 1993:67).\(^\text{14}\) When learning to perform within in a tradition it is even more important to have opportunities to study with masters of the music, especially because learning is a more involved, interactive experience than simply listening. Not only do artists teach proper technique and musical concepts, but also

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\(^{14}\) While recorded music may be in many ways inferior to live music (particularly in the diasporic context that Slobin mentions), iconic recordings (in the jazz tradition, in particular) are valuable as sources of study and have their own particular history.
important cultural codes and musical philosophies.

Wes Brown, Jay Hoggard, Anthony Davis, and Gerry Hemingway all studied world percussion traditions with the newly hired masters of South Indian and Ghanaian drumming. Hoggard, Brown, and Hemingway would all study with Abraham Adzenyah and Freeman Donkor in the early and mid 1970s, and they all would perform with Adzenyah at some point. Brown would later become a long time member of Adzenyah’s group Talking Drums, and Hemingway would produce “Afro-American Drum Concert 4/75” (1975) with Adzenyah and Brown.\(^{15}\)

Although he did not formally study any world traditions, and his music does not engage with traditional world musics in any obvious ways, George Lewis considers this engagement with world musics a defining factor in how creative music progressed in the 1970s.

> the idea was that all of us...were informed by multiple sources and cultures. There was a lot of—you know, by this time technology, travel, you know—the movement of sounds but through technological means—things kind of become a big candy store, and so in a way we were in touch with—it wasn’t like we were privileged or anything; you can see these same kinds of proto-globalizing influences in the hard bop people, or Henry Cowell, or whomever. But in our case, that process could be—because our generation, that process was expanded and much more rapid. And as a result of that, we—people could speak in multiple voices that weren’t over-determined by race or gender. (Lewis interviewed by Bendian 2013: 8)

Davis was profoundly influenced by his study of solkattu at Wesleyan. It allowed him to find new ways to approach rhythm.

\(^{15}\)A recording of this concert is included in Hemingway’s archives, currently housed at Firehouse 12 in New Haven.
Raghavan was like the rhythm doctor. We all went up to work with him to work on our time, to develop our ability to work and get the rhythms. So it influenced me in a profound way in terms of how I structure...and how I use different kind of rhythmic structures as a basis of compositions. (Davis interview 2014)

He explains that although he was already interested in mathematics, the cyclic nature of Indian rhythms allowed him to begin to apply his mathematical thinking towards generating more and more complex rhythms. Davis recalls the “aha” moment when he realized that a 12 bar blues could be thought of as a 48 beat structure, and this revelation opened up a whole new world of compositional possibilities:

I’m very mathematically inclined. Initially I was thinking about being a math major, I was very talented in math. So all the math stuff was something that I was instantaneously drawn to. So I was really interested in organizing cycles and thinking about....Also I was studying renaissance music, like isorhythmic motets, but thinking about the architecture, using architecture built in rhythm. So I began to incorporate some of the Carnatic ideas of rhythm but also thinking about it on a large-scale form. Also, (thinking) about how that could be a dramatic structure. Like in my opera X and stuff like that, a lot of that comes out of my engagement with Carnatic music, and also gamelan music. Thinking about rhythmic structure being the basis for large-scale forms and using those as structures. (Davis interview 2014)

Jay Hoggard also studied Ghanaian and other non-European musics at Wesleyan, writing his thesis as a Masters student (1992) on the various xylophone traditions of Africa. Indeed, the world music program was one of the elements that convinced him to join the program. Hoggard explains that although he had close connections to Yale through Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis
Gates, he believed that Wesleyan was a better fit for him because of the university's embrace of world traditions (Hoggard interview 2014).

After dropping out of Berklee College of Music in 1973, Gerry Hemingway would spend a great deal of time at Wesleyan, studying different world percussion traditions.

In this same period I made connections to the music department at Wesleyan University in Middletown. There I met, studied privately with, and also participated in, the classes of the West African master drummer Abraham Kobina Adzinyah and South Indian mrdangamist Ramnad V. Rhagavan[sic]. Those two disciplines opened up many new dimensions to my understanding of the organization of rhythm and of the subtlety and deepness of groove. (Hemingway interviewed by McMullen 1998:3)

Elaborating on this, Hemingway explains an important lesson that he learned as a student of Adzenyah, a lesson in humility and listening that he thinks about to this day:

So we had a lesson, and this lesson was perhaps maybe the single most profound drum lesson that I've probably ever had in my life...He says, ‘can you just play this rhythm that you’ve been playing in the ensemble?’ Sings pattern. I say, ‘oh, yeah, sure, sure, no problem.’ I play it once, I don’t even get to the end of those four notes and he says, “no, no, that’s not it. Listen again.’ He plays it for me and I listen and I go ‘yeah, yeah, I got it.’ And I play the rhythm, and he stops me again and he says, ‘no, no, no, listen again.’ I only repeat it twice. He says, ‘no, you’ve got to listen to it.’ I’m becoming, of course, red faced and upset and I don’t understand what’s going on because I think I’m playing it right and he’s telling me that I’m playing it wrong. And I don’t get it and he won’t explain anything to me, of course, which is the famous African way: ‘you should just listen motherfucker and figure it out!’ (laughs) But I don’t get any of that and
I’m just listening to him and slowly my whole ego takes a big bath, goes, ‘ok, dude. I guess you really don’t understand this. You thought you got all this and I guess you don’t have all this.’ ... I was upset and angry and I didn’t know what to make of the whole situation when I left it, but I slowly learned a lot. And I’m still learning from that lesson in a way, it always is a reminder to me. (Hemingway interview 2014)

Adzenyah’s lesson to Hemingway to listen closer to the subtleties of the music, the tonal inflections and microtimings of the music were a profound influence on his playing and compositions. He was also influenced by the mechanics of South Indian and West African music. His solo piece “Trance Tracks,” is an excellent example of this synthesis, as Hemingway explains, it borrows from both South Indian and West African traditions simultaneously. Both in its formal construct and its mathematical principles that inform the way in which the whole piece unfolds musically. For example, it has a ten cycle, against a three cycle, against a two against three cycle, against a four. (Hemingway interview 2014)

**Intercultural Collaborations: Geechee Recollections and Gardens of Harlem**

During this period, in the early 1970s, Marion Brown recorded *Geechee Recollections* (1973), featuring Leo Smith, fellow AACM member Steve McCall on drums and Abraham Adzenyah on a variety of Ghanaian percussion instruments. The following year, Clifford Thornton, a composer/improviser who was teaching at Wesleyan, would also record his *The Gardens of Harlem* (1975) with the Jazz Composers Orchestra, also featuring Smith and Adzenyah. Thornton was part of a vibrant scene of intercultural collaboration centered around Wesleyan. His
earlier album *Communications Network* (1972) featured the South Indian violin virtuoso L. Shankar (PhD 1974), and American saxophonist Nathan Davis (PhD 1974), both Wesleyan graduate students at the time. Also featuring poet Jayne Cortez (1934-2010), *Communications Network* is the earliest commercial recording of Jay Hoggard’s playing.

The collaborations of both Brown and Thornton were led by musicians who wanted to actively engage with their own conceptions of African modes of music making, specifically an African ideal of music that was engaged with extra-musical concerns. Marion Brown states about *Geechee Recollections*: “I plan to concentrate on the function of African music in African societies, and I’d like to reflect the interest that I have in my recordings, without being superfluous. That is, I’d like to give more thought to what I’m going to do with what I will discover about African music than people sometimes do when they’re just interested in things” (in Palmer 1974a: 12). Brown felt that many musicians during the period were not sufficiently engaged in deep ethnomusicological exploration of world traditions, and that many “self appointed ethnomusicologists” (Brown, et. al 1984:51) were using surface elements of different musics without any real understanding of the traditions behind them.

I see people, percussionists, they have tablas, African drums, everything you can think of. They can’t know them all!...Now, I do know Afro-Americans, and I know European Americans who play ethnic instruments. But most studied at Wesleyan University. And they go after that to do post-graduate studies in the various countries....But most of the people really don’t know. Because they haven’t studied...It’s hip to be an ethnomusicologist. (ibid.)
Like Brown, Thornton also believed that it was important to use concepts from West African music in a more rigorous way than the many composers who casually borrowed from different African traditions:

if we can seriously set down these rhythms, and more than that, understand the philosophical and religious bases for their existence, meanings, and functions, then we'll be further evolving out of the tradition of African-derived cultures. We'll be evolving authentically if we can directly reflect and grow out of a continuum which is recognizable, definable, and African in origin while retaining our own contemporary ears and feel. (in Palmer 1975:19)

Clifford Thornton not only taught at Wesleyan University from 1969 to 1975, but, like Smith, was actively engaged in learning about world music traditions. In a 1975 piece in *Down Beat* magazine, Thornton recalls how in 1969 he stumbled upon an active music scene focused on a variety of musics.

‘Sun Ra came here to Middletown to play,’ he explains, ‘for a World Music Weekend. Donald Byrd, Andrew Hill, and Sam Rivers, Robin Kenyatta-a lot of people were playing here, along with Indian musicians and American Indian musicians and some others. The Indians took us to dinner and we heard their music and it wiped me out. When it was time to go somebody told me I didn’t have to go, so I stayed for the weekend.’

(Thornton in Palmer 1975:42)

Eventually, Thornton, commuting from NYC, would become a Visiting Artist and began collaborating with musicians from various world traditions. He was especially interested, not surprisingly given his background and attendance of the Pan-African festival in Algiers in 1969, in West African traditional music.

‘Immediately I became fascinated by the African cats who were here, even though they weren’t really all that curious about jazz. They like Caribbean
music, Afro-Cuban music, James Brown, and I just went along with that. I was interested in whatever they were interested in. And of course, being faculty, I could take courses; so I took West African drumming, advanced seminars in ethnomusicology.’ (ibid. 42)

Thornton, who was close with many of the musicians active in New York’s loft scene, also brought Sam Rivers to Wesleyan to teach an ensemble from 1970-73 (Voce 2011).

*The Gardens of Harlem* and *Geechee Recollections*, both ostensibly lent a degree of authenticity by virtue of the work of Abraham Adzenyah, are important documents because they represent a collaborative model of Pan-African music making that actively drew on the expertise of an African traditional musician as both adviser and collaborator. Unlike earlier Pan-African collaborations, like the intercultural musical production of Dizzy Gillespie and Chano Pozo, which simply, as Jason Stanyek points out, “utilized improvisation as a kind of linking device” (2004:89), both Brown and Thornton were interested in their recordings having some sense of connection to a notion of authentic or correct West African drumming.

Speaking of their landmark collaboration on “Manteca,” Gillespie recounts that Pozo showed all of the parts to him, one by one, as he wrote them down. Gillespie recalls that he thought, “There’s just all this rhythm going on, I must do something to make harmony in this, so then I wrote this bridge, and then I took it to [arranger] Gil Fuller….and he blew it up” (Gillespie in Rosow 2001).

Gillespie’s collaboration with Pozo required the big band and Pozo to adjust slightly to each other’s playing, but didn’t really require any of the musicians to
radically alter their approaches. Pozo and Gillespie believed that, by virtue of the shared African ancestry of their musics, they both spoke a musical lingua franca that allowed them to negotiate the differences in their traditions. As David García writes, they were able to collaborate via “the shared African cultural memory that these two musicians claimed, as exemplified in Pozo’s statement and retold by Gillespie, that they ‘both speak African’ in lieu of their inability to speak English and Spanish, respectively” (Garcia 2011:196).

While both Gillespie and Pozo may have spoken “African” by virtue of the shared ancestry of their musics, Clifford Thornton was interested in understanding the particular organization of Ghanaian traditional music as well as gaining an understanding some of the cultural aspects that accompanied the music in its original context. Accordingly, for his album *The Gardens of Harlem*, the process was more involved and required a greater degree of preparation. Musically, Thornton wanted to make sure that the music he was writing fit together with the Ewe traditional rhythms that Adzenyah would be in charge of leading as master drummer. Thornton tasked himself with creating pieces that incorporated an ensemble of drummers from various backgrounds playing variations on traditional Ghanaian rhythms. He worked closely with Adzenyah to make sure that the orchestra’s parts fit with the drumming. Adzenyah recalls:

> And he came up with all of these compositions, but the problem was, the rhythms that he used, it didn’t fit. So I said, ‘Clifford, you can’t play in this manner, it should be this way, then you’ll be able to meet me half way’. So, we shared that knowledge together and it worked perfectly. (Adzenyah interview 2015)

Adzenyah also recalls that the drummers, including Milton Cardona, Jerry
Gonzalez, and Gene Golden, who were primarily drawn from New York’s vibrant Latin music scene, found ways to integrate their own drumming vocabularies into the music.

they also had a broad perspective of rhythms, their rhythms. So I would play it, and also they would come up with what they knew from their vocabulary or their point of view. And then everything merged, that’s how we did it. (ibid.)

Unlike Gillespie’s collaboration with Pozo, where both musicians were able to stay more or less within their own traditions, “utilizing improvisation as a linking device,” the collaboration between Thornton and Adzenyah was one that required the two musicians to work together closely in preparation of their performance and required Thornton to acquire basic knowledge of a very specific tradition. Thornton’s collaboration also required him and the drummers from around the diaspora to recalibrate their rhythms to accommodate Adzenyah’s Ewe rhythms. Adzenyah’s own training as someone who was born into a Fanti drumming family, but who learned the Ewe repertoire as a university student gave him a special insight into teaching these rhythms to drummers from other parts of Africa and the diaspora (Adzenyah interview 2015).

At the time, Palmer recognized the importance of this kind of collaboration.

The Gardens of Harlem, soon to be released by JCOA Records, is in fact the first ‘jazz’ work to take African music at face value. Seven percussionists are featured playing African instruments, but rather than turn them loose on a rough rhythmic framework, as jazz composers usually do, Thornton has structured their interplay as strictly as an African master drummer would have. His studies with African musicians,
principally the Ghanaian drummer Kobena Adzenyah and the Nigerian musicologist Fela Sowande, led him to conclude that this relatively tight kind of control is necessary if African polyrhythms are to exist and function on their own terms. (ibid. 19)

Brown’s collaborations also required that he familiarize himself with the fundamentals of structuring an African drumming ensemble, albeit in a creative fashion. He put the musicians in a new situation, in which they had to find how to fit traditional rhythms into a compositional framework that he devised.

Accordingly, “Buttermilk Bottom” features Steve McCall, Adzenyah, and Jumma Santos all contributing their own African and diasporic patterns and microtimings to the basic 12/8 feel. The rhythm section gives the music the dizzying effect of the imposition of many divergent musical histories with a common ancestral background upon one another. A clearer precedent for this project, rather than Gillespie and Pozo’s collaboration, is Max Roach’s work with Babatunde Olatunji and other drummers from the diaspora in 1960 on his album *We Insist!*. According to scholar Njoroge Njoroge, the “conversation between Roach, Du Vail, Mantilla, and Olatunji speak[s] to the *polyrhythmic* unity of the diaspora” (2008:99).

Marion Brown describes the process of arranging one of the pieces on the album from his point of view in a 1974 interview:

> I approached the piece with four specific drum patterns in 6/8 time, which I gave to Adzenyah (a Ghanaian master drummer of the Fante tribe-BP), Jumma Santos, Bill Malone, and Bill Hassan. These basic patterns were taken emotionally by the musicians and fashioned into something that was beyond what I had conceived of on paper, yet it had the same structure. For the melodic aspects of it, I used very few notes other than those used for the rhythmic base. (in Palmer 1974a:12)
Geechee Recollections, on Impulse! records, was highly influential among creative musicians coming of age in the 1970s, and percussionist Adam Rudolph considers it one of the most important documents of that time period. Abraham Adzenyah describes how he came to meet Marion Brown:

[Marion Brown] heard that they have an African musician here at Wesleyan. So he said, ‘Oh, come on. Let me invite him. Because I’m teaching this improvisation (course) in this school and this is what we need.’ So he brought me down and I taught it. I think I first met him, as you said, in New Haven, because I also used to teach in New Haven at the Center for the Arts. I think that was the first time that he heard me, and he also heard that I was up at Wesleyan teaching, so he invited me and I went to Bowdoin and stayed two weeks and did workshops. Oh, it was so nice, he loved it! And that’s how we connected. (Adzenyah interview 2015)

Adzenyah also describes the collaborative nature of the music. In his work on *Geechee Recollections*, Adzenyah had plenty of time to audition rhythms for Brown and find ones that would fit the music and work with what the rest of the drummers were playing.

AA: Yes, that was the first time that I met them, but we had a ball. We had a nice time playing together.
SS: So, I guess on that record, like most of your collaborations, you listened to what was happening and then you picked rhythms to play.
AA: Yes, and with Marion Brown, he also directed me in what he wanted on the record. I would play some rhythms and he would say, ‘Oh, yes, this would be really nice.’ And McCall and all those guys said, ‘Yeah, Abraham, this is great, this will fit nicely!’
SS: So you kind of auditioned rhythms for them and said, ‘What about this?’
AA: Oh, yeah. That’s how we did it, we played together and they also
approved of my playing. Like, ‘Oh, yeah, this is good, this will fit this composition.’ (Adzenyah interview 2015)

Despite his background playing a wide variety of Afro-diasporic music,¹⁶ almost all of the material that Adzenyah played was from traditional Ghanaian sources. Adzenyah describes how his playing of the gyil (from Northern Ghana) was all traditional material, played in what Adzenyah describes as “an ironic manner.”

SS: Some of the gyili stuff on there is kind of out of rhythm.
AA: Yeah, you see, there’s some room for creativity. So you hear it, you need to create, to come up with something. Maybe the rhythm that you play, but you turn it a little bit in an ironic manner and then you play it. But you know exactly what you are doing.
SS: So you were playing things that you knew, that were traditional, but playing them rubato and playing them out of time.
AA: Exactly. You know, turning them around a little bit to make them fit. (Adzenyah interview 2015)

Adzenyah describes his approach to playing traditional material in a non-traditional/creative music context as “ironic.” Clearly, his ideas of how he is using traditional source material is different from his collaborators, who stress the importance of bringing traditional African functionality into their music through the incorporation of traditional materials. In order for Adzenyah to work the traditional material into Brown’s compositions, he had to change the material, and “signify” on it, in an ironic manner.

Adzenyah’s “ironic manner” brings to mind Henry Louis Gates’ analysis of

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¹⁶ Adzenyah recalls, “I’ve played mambo, samba, calypso, cha-cha. All of these on the congas. So I have that vocabulary. And I play timbales.” In fact Adzenyah built his own timbales at a young age after hearing them played on a radio broadcast. “I heard (timbales being played) on the radio and said, ‘Oh, wow, this is nice!’ And then I made myself drums and started playing” (Adzenyah interview 2015).
Signifyin(g), a practice in African American culture which Gates’ demonstrates has deep roots in West African culture. Ostensibly, approaching these rhythms and melodies that are in many cases tied to ceremonial or recreational events with specific cultural functions in “an ironic manner” was the best way that Adzenyah could think to fit them into a context so divergent from their original provenance.

Abraham Adzenyah also often played with Ornette Coleman quartet drummer Ed Blackwell, who began teaching at Wesleyan in the 1970s, and they would show each other different rhythms that they had learned through their respective studies. Adzenyah recalls that “Ed Blackwell went bananas when we played together...and he adopted these rhythms from different areas on the drum set” (Adzenyah interview 2015). Don Cherry also notes that he began to recognize the depth of these African and diasporic influences in Blackwell’s playing when he was travelling in Africa, recalling:

When I was in Africa I realized Blackwell has that in his playing; how he tunes his drums is how the real master drummer playing a Western trap set will tune his drums. Blackwell tunes so each drum is independent and has a part to play about intonation, pitch. When he's playing he can sound like 10 drummers, because each drum as it's tuned can sound like a different person. In African [music] you have 10 drummers, each with their own drum, and playing together they make the rhythm. Each of Blackwell's drums plays a part in relation to the whole sound of the rhythm. That's where it's coming from. (Mandel 1998)
A New World Music

Although he was never formally enrolled as a student, Leo Smith would study different world traditions informally at Wesleyan in 1975-1976, during the period that his frequent collaborator Marion Brown was enrolled as a graduate student.

Smith’s introduction to a variety of different world traditions, particularly from Africa, occurred during 1969 while he was living in Paris. For the most part, this was in the form of live performances, and he also recalls collaborating with traditional musicians from Egypt and across North Africa during this period (Smith interview 2015). While he was at Wesleyan, his study was focused on learning the mechanics of different traditional musics from around the world. He recalls his experience, emphasizing that he was primarily interested in learning these traditions for their utility in his work as a composer/improviser:

my experience with African music, and later with Indonesian music was all direct. And Chinese music and Japanese music, those things were direct, I got them from personal viewing of concerts or I found a contact, like at Wesleyan University for example, I studied Indonesian gamelan music, I studied Ghanaian flute, I studied Balinese music and I also did an anthropological study of Native American music. And those studies were not done for me to grasp some kind of idea about anthropological studies, I did them as an artist looking at and investigating those musics to see what their contents were. (Smith interview 2015)

Smith is clear that he engaged in this kind of inquiry in order to understand the musical “contents” of different world traditions, which were more important for him as a composer than the cultural aspects of those musics. Smith, who would
go on to have a long career in academia, establishing the African American Improvisational Music program at CalArts (Smith n.d.), was somewhat ambivalent about his experience at Wesleyan.

I went there to gather information about African music and Indonesian music, Japanese music, Indian music... But immediately after getting in there, I realized that that wasn’t the place to be and that studying in this kind of a context, while it was fine, I could do—I believed that I could cover more ground and be a little bit more thorough than I could be in a classroom setting, so I pursued that for just a tiny bit. Then I moved away from it, because, you see, I’m an artist. (Smith interviewed by Bynum 2011b: 3)

Smith clarifies that he believes that the kind of rigor that scholarship requires moves the scholar away from the immediacy of creating art.

I strongly believe that the artistic, literary view is just as important as the scholarly view, and that they both look at the same thing and come up with different ideas about the same thing, and that the ideas that they come up with, that is the artists, come up with is the closest to the real thing, as opposed to what the scholar does. The scholar actually pollutes his or her research with tons of footnotes and documents and research and cross polarization, etc... whereas when the artist looks at something, they are dealing more with the spontaneous, intuitive reality of their artistic journey. Therefore, you don’t need footnotes and cross-pollination to say that this gives me credibility or authenticate what I’m doing. (Smith interview 2015)

While Smith does not consider himself a scholar, his activities, like many of the New Haven cohort, are firmly within the artist/scholar philosophy articulated by Mantle Hood in his essay “Bimusicality” (1960). Smith’s study of traditional world musics as a way to expand his compositional and improvisational palette
and as a method to better understand what Anthony Braxton refers to as “composite reality,” fit squarely into Hood’s overall pedagogical philosophy. As Alex W. Rodriguez writes, “by training students to perform in the style of Javanese gamelan, and hiring experts in other traditional styles to teach at UCLA, Hood developed a pedagogical approach that included the study of non-Western musical practices through performance as a gateway to understanding musicality more generally” (Rodriguez 2015:175).

Additionally, Smith is intellectually invested in defining his own music and situating it within a larger socio-cultural and historical context. In many ways Smith is a scholar, although he eschews the terminology, preferring to see himself as “an artist.” While Smith may be setting up a false dichotomy, he raises important issues about the relative value of scholarship and creative work, and the purpose of both pursuits.

Smith also raises an important point when he states that, “the scholar actually pollutes his or her research with tons of footnotes and documents.” On the one hand, these conventions are vital practices that give historical weight and validity to scholarship. However, because the history of jazz and creative music has often, as Smith argues in notes (1973), been written by critics who do not respect or properly understand the music, using these sources without interrogating them only serves to reinforce a view of the music divorced from the philosophy of its practitioners. This is one reason that oral histories and ethnographic methods have been crucial to shaping a new understanding of jazz and creative music that privileges insider perspectives.
Smith continued to be inspired by concepts from African music, albeit in a form that abstracted the original materials in creative and novel ways. Smith would adapt musical and philosophical concepts from African music that gave his music a much different character than the stereotypical qualities that many associate with the music emanating from that continent:

Even in my book *8 notes creative music: a new world music* I talk about the same thing that I’m talking about now, about how this music has been limited by the idea that the drum propels and pushes and drives it, forces it. It’s not true, every instrument has rhythm, every instrument can be implied to determine the natural, organic flow of the ensemble, and drums is one instrument that’s equal to the other instruments but definitely not much more than any other instrument. (Smith interview 2015)

Smith’s idea of proportional notation is one such key concept. The idea is that all of the musicians have the same score, but each musician adds their own contributions playing in their own time, the result of which becomes a negotiated time and interpretation.

With music that revels in proportional elements every time it’s played the proportions remain relatively the same but the notion of the patterns change and every time another person is added to that same equation or proportional selection it takes a new definition. It becomes new, because then it becomes two. Even though they are playing the same proportions it becomes two.... If you add somebody to that...it becomes larger and larger and larger each time. But in metrical music it does not become larger and larger and larger. (ibid.)

In these pieces that utilize “proportional notation,” Smith’s music is realized by the members of the ensemble, who each have the full score with each of their parts. Like the organization of an African drumming ensemble, or the
interlocking parts of many African and Afro-diasporic musics, each member has a separate part that fits together to create a unified whole. These structures are often cycles that are repeated.

Michael Veal, in response to many commentators who have claimed that John Coltrane’s late period quartet with drummer Rashied Ali completely abandoned this grid system relationship, believes that instead of abandoning it, that Coltrane’s ensemble adapted that model to suit the expansion of his rhythmic concept beyond playing within a traditional pulse. Veal draws parallels between the way that Coltrane’s quartet stretches this relationship and curvilinear architecture. Smith’s proportional notation is essentially the notational/philosophical equivalent of what Michael Veal describes in relation to John Coltrane’s late quartet when he refers to “Deforming the African Grid” (Veal 2015, unpublished). While Veal describes a phenomenon that he has carefully observed and documented, Smith has taken the grid system philosophy of traditional African drumming and adapted it to create a group cohesion that is not based on strict tempo, but rather achieved by a negotiation between each member’s individual placement of the pulse. While the surface elements do not sound like a West African drumming ensemble, the key aspects that govern group cohesion are drawn from an African context.

The Creative Music Improvisers Forum (1975-85)

In 1975, Leo Smith helped organize a group of creative musicians active in New Haven into the Creative Music Improvisers Forum. The CMIF was the only
official organization dedicated to creative music founded in New Haven during that time, and although it began, according to Gerry Hemingway (Hemingway interview 2014) with only 4 people it would quickly become much larger and stage many important concerts.

In addition to convening the group for performances, Smith actively demonstrated to the musicians of the CMIF how to present and disseminate their original music in an attempt to create the kind of collective energy that he had experienced as a member of the AACM in Chicago. Smith recalls:

They all met at my house up in Hamden, where I lived. And we organized that Creative Music Improvisers Forum, and from there, people learned how to present their own concerts. They also learned how to put out their own records. The only guy in there that had his own records out was Bobby Naughton. He had OTIC Records at the time. And I had put out my Kabell already. (Smith interviewed by Bynum 2011a:53)

Gerry Hemingway describes the founding of the CMIF, an organization that he would become the treasurer of:

That was 1975, and it was originally...The four people who started CMIF were: it was Leo, myself, Bobby Naughton, and Wes Brown. There are some contrary stories to that but we are the original...I was the treasurer, no. Leo was the president, Bobby was the vice president, Wes was the secretary, and I was the treasurer. You know, banking was in the family, like I told you (laughter). So I went into treasurer mode, and we were the ones who authored the 501c3 and got it to happen. And then more people got involved pretty quickly. (Hemingway interview 2014)

By 1977, the group was presenting concerts. Smith describes a slightly larger original membership in a 2011 interview, stating that, “there was nobody here to really run stuff except me at this point, so I started organizing guys,” listing as
some of the original members, “Bobby Naughton, Dwight Andrews, Wes Brown, Anthony Davis, Mario Pavone, [and saxophonist David] Mott, who was teaching at Yale” (Smith Interviewed by Bynum 2011a:53).

The CMIF produced quite a few concerts at Real Art Ways (RAW), a loft space in Hartford curated by Joseph Celli. Reminiscent of many of the loft spaces of Lower Manhattan, “Real Art Ways began in the fall of 1975 when a group of visual artists and musicians took over a rambling upstairs space on Asylum Street in downtown Hartford and created a bare bones salon in which they lived, worked and presented the work of others” (“Real Art. All Ways”). Eventually the group would count among its membership trombonist and Wesleyan professor Bill Lowe, who composed for the group. Smith and the rest of the collective arranged for commissions from a wide variety of artists.

it was quite successful because you look at the amount of people that we brought in from the outside, starting with Slide Hampton, Randy Weston, Carla Bley, Muhal Richard Abrams, Anthony Braxton, Leroy Jenkins. We brought in a substantial number of people for our orchestra, who we commissioned to write pieces for us. So that whole journey was something that cultivated a quite refreshing scene in Connecticut. (Smith interview 2015)

Smith also wanted to bring in George Russell, who was interested but ultimately declined, not for financial reasons, but rather because the band wasn’t able to commit to the full week of rehearsals that Russell believed the music required. Smith recalls that it was “a really good lesson for everybody in the ensemble, because it showed that he was concerned about music and not money” (Smith interviewed by Bynum 2011a:54).
A 1979 version of the group performing at Real Art Ways featured Bobby Naughton and Bob Desesa on vibraphone, Harry Williams on piano, Genghis Nor on trumpet, Dwight Andrews playing various woodwinds, both Mario Pavone and Wes Brown on bass, and guest Derek Bailey on guitar. A 1980 Real Art Ways festival appearance has a slightly different line-up adding Gerry Hemingway on drums, Harryson Buster on congas, and RAW director Joseph Celli on oboe (“Jazz Improvisors Present Premiers” 1979:5F; McNally 1980:1G).

The 1980 festival also featured Anthony Braxton’s small group with George Lewis on trombone and electronics and multi-instrumentalist Douglas Ewart. Another group performing on the bill was an early version of Anthony Davis’ group Episteme featuring flautist James Newton, George Lewis on trombone, Abdul Wadud on cello, Rick Rozie on bass, and Pheeroan akLaff on drums. Presaging their work in the trio format with Davis, James Newton and Wadud played a duo to open the set. A 1981 festival featured the CMIF along with performances of string quartets by Smith, Braxton AACM founding member Muhal Richard Abrams, and composer Talib Rasul Hakim, brother of percussionist Joe Chambers (McNally 1981:D.1).

One particularly memorable event produced by the collective was a joint AACM-CMIF collaboration in 1983. The orchestra was captured (without the guest AACM members) one year earlier resulting in the excellent, and compositionally diverse, self-produced *Sky Cries the Blues* (Creative Improvisor’s Orchestra 1982), featuring Hemmingway, Wes Brown, Bobby Naughton, as well as alto saxophonists Oliver Lake and Marty Ehrlich.
The album, the only release on CMIF records, features compositions by Smith, Hemingway, and Bobby Naughton. It covers a variety of stylistic and conceptual terrain, from Naughton’s groovy Andrew Hill influenced “Picric Wobble,” featuring a battery of percussion, to Smith’s floating, ethereal, serialism-influenced “Black Fire in Motherland-My Soul. During this period Hemingway reconnected with Anthony Braxton, having previously met him in New Haven in 1974, during a performance of Smith’s (Lock 1988:257). Shortly after this collaboration, Hemingway would join Braxton’s quartet, and fill the drum chair for the next 10 years (Hemingway interview 2014). During that time Braxton was living in New Haven with his family in “extreme poverty,” after losing his record deal on Arista due to the commercial failure of some of his more ambitious projects (particularly Composition 82, written for four orchestras) (Lock 1988:3).

Robert Palmer’s review of Sky Cries the Blues was mixed, praising some of Smith’s writing, criticizing some of his more arrhythmic, atonal music. However, Palmer praises Smith’s “Return To My Native Land II,” recognizing its eclectic influences:

'Return To My Native Land II' is a 15-minute composition full of shifting instrumental colors and thematically-oriented improvisations, and in this idiom Mr. Smith has few peers. The composition’s beginning and end employ percussion effects reminiscent of some of Iannis Xenakis's mid-

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17 Gerry Hemingway writes, “At this point Anthony, [his wife] Nickie, and the kids were living in New Haven. They had moved from Woodstock in 1984 after missing their first payment on a house mortgage. At Leo Smith’s encouragement they decided to move to New Haven and fortunately found a place with...a flexible landlord” (Hemingway 1995:104).
1960’s orchestral music, but Oliver Lake’s dramatic saxophone solo, a lovely bit of brass scoring that bows in Duke Ellington’s direction, a lush dialogue for vibraphone and flute, and the overall direction and flow of the piece are Leo Smith at his best.
(Palmer 1983. H27)

A 1984 review of a concert at Real Art Ways is also critical of the sometimes difficult, contemplative music (McNally 1984:D3). Indeed, the lack of an audience that understood the hybrid aesthetic of the CMIF, and the fact that critics tended to evaluate them using their standard criteria for jazz ensembles was a sticking point for the members. In a 1981 Hartford Courant profile, Owen McNally writes:

What has really hurt the collective’s ventures in Connecticut, the founders say, is that their music is invariably stuffed into the category of jazz or the jazz avant-garde. Being pigeonholed like that, they claim, is not only unfair—their music, they say, is really world music—but also tends to drive off potential listeners. All this is aggravated, they add. (McNally 1981:D.1)

Co-founder Bobby Naughton states that one of the goals of the CMIF was to communicate through music, claiming that “Language is dead today” (ibid.). He also describes their musical aesthetics and goals:

We also want a lyrical quality and aren’t hung up on John Cage. And we reject Dada playing. After all, once you’ve turned the toilet bowl upside down, where do you go from there? We are artists who want to reach out. We don’t just want a small coterie, we want to reach out to a mass audience to get our messages across. (ibid.)

Ultimately, although the CMIF produced years of excellent concerts focusing on a wide variety of creativity and bringing together musicians exploring the interstices of composition and improvisation in exciting new ways, they
would fall short of their goal of allowing their message to “reach a mass audience.” Smith recalls that the group ultimately broke up because the rest of the membership was not interested in building an organization on the scale of Smith’s original vision.

They were happy with presenting concerts. They were happy bringing people down. That didn’t make me happy. I did all that before, you see. I wanted to move into other areas, like, for example, where you incorporate and put money into the project. (Smith interviewed by Bynum 2011a:55)

The CMIF would eventually disband in the mid 1980s, but their 10-year run represented a high point in creative music in Connecticut and would become an inspiration and model for the many musicians who were involved in the collective.

**New Dalta Ahkri: *Song of Humanity***

In 1976, Wadada Leo Smith and his ensemble, New Dalta Ahkri, would record a landmark document, *Song of Humanity*, self-released on his Kabell Records.¹⁸ Featuring Oliver Lake, Anthony Davis, Wes Brown, and Pheeroan akLaff, the record represents a further evolution of Smith’s group, building on the discoveries of his trio record with Davis and Brown, *Reflectactivity* (1975). *Song of Humanity* documents a group that was representative of the more experimental strain of musical activity in New Haven during the period. It also

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¹⁸ The name New Dalta Ahkri has been used by Smith for a range of ensembles with different instrumentation and personnel throughout the years. Smith notes that “In late 1970, I organized a group called the New Dalta Ahkri (‘Ahkri’ is a word representing a perfect union) and the idea behind it was to create music of totally different orders and to have these centers of activity fluctuate in terms of involvement, intensity, and contribution” (Ness 1976).
represents a high point in the evolution of Smith’s concept, and the first clear example of Anthony Davis’ compositional prowess. One of Smith’s only records utilizing the classic quintet format popularized by Charlie Parker during the bebop era, it demonstrates the vast array of sonic possibilities available through the use of that classic ensemble. *Song of Humanity* is also the first album to feature Davis’ composition, “Of Blues and Dreams,” a piece that would become a staple of his repertoire with his own groups. James Newton, who would perform with Lake one year later in Los Angeles and become a frequent collaborator of Davis’, recalls the impact of that record, which he was able to acquire from Poo-Bah records in Pasadena, CA.

The reason that I wanted to play with Anthony Davis was that we were really listening a lot to Wadada’s New Dalta Ahkri recording with Oliver Lake, and Anthony Davis was on there. I think that might have been Pheeroan’s first recordings as well. And when I heard ‘Of Blues and Dreams’ by Anthony Davis, I just could not believe it. I was just stunned! And Wadada’s music had a big impact on me and that was such a fertile time in the music, and it really has not received the historical significance that that period deserves. (Newton interview 2016a)

According to Newton, he was able to find out about Smith’s work, including *notes* (1973), and the New Haven scene at a relatively early point in his musical development through Poo-Bah’s owner’s excellent and eclectic taste.

[Leo Smith’s] *notes*, I know a number of us bought that. Because there was a really hip record store, it was called Poo-Bah’s in Pasadena, and this incredible owner, his name was Jay Green. And Jay was a guy that really loved the music. We could get Oliver Lake’s poetry, *Life Dance of Is*, Wadada’s *notes*, and Joseph Jarman’s writing, we were really looking at the AACM (ibid.)
*Song of Humanity* (1977) is striking in many respects, especially in its use of space and interesting pairings of the musicians of the quintet. It’s not surprising how taken Newton was by Davis’ writing on the record. Davis’ first piece on the album, “Lexicon,” which starts out with a beautiful press-roll by akLaff, continues with a wonderfully atonal section that blurs the line between composition and improvisation. With a driving pulse but no fixed time, it recalls Cecil Taylor’s writing on *Unit Structures* (1966) but is wholly original. It also takes advantage of Davis’ thorough grasp of twentieth century harmony. As James Newton recalls of first hearing Davis’ group:

> And then the extended compositions, and what I really noticed was that his command of large-form composition was just staggering. It wasn’t like one formula from piece to piece. There were huge changes and in that way, because he had all that harmonic language too, he was head and shoulders above just about everybody else. (Newton interview 2016a)

The piece also features Davis’ internalization (true to the piece’s name, “Lexicon”) of multiple piano styles, from Ellington to Hancock. After Davis’ solo it opens up into a fiery drum solo from akLaff, in which he exhibits his ample technique, becoming a duo with Smith and then trio with Lake. Wes Brown enters after a brief period and then the piece then ends with akLaff’s press-roll cueing another trio section, based on the same material, but distinct from the first. This piece, carefully thought out and composed, showcasing the extreme variety of material that the members of New Dalta Ahkri had internalized, would become a staple of Davis’ compositions in live performance.

“Of Blues and Dreams,” is equally striking. This piece is an excellent example of Davis’ early aesthetic, filtered through the lens of bandleader Leo
Smith. The version on *Song of Humanity* bears some of Smith’s influence, featuring sections with duos and trios taken from the larger quintet improvising in dialogue with one another. The piece begins with a brief, improvised duo between Wes Brown on bass and Oliver Lake on alto saxophone, featuring Lake’s extended techniques. At 0:30, Lake begins to play a written melody, accompanied by Brown playing short bursts of fast out-of-time pizzicato accompaniment with akLaff on brushes. Lake plays with a beautiful vibrato and expressive scoops calling to mind Johnny Hodges’ playing with the Ellington orchestra. At 2:15, after a passage by the trio of Davis, Brown and akLaff, the initial theme enters over a rubato accompaniment from Davis, with Brown playing bowed long tones, and akLaff coloring the proceedings with mallets on cymbals.

The main melody is played over akLaff channeling broken up Afro-Cuban rhythms on drums and cymbals. At 4:10, over the same groove, Smith and Lake play complex written parts, slowly breaking away from their respective parts that have an almost hocketed relationship. This strategy, of instructing soloists to improvise starting with short melodic cells that emerged from the composition, would later become a hallmark of Davis’ music with his group Episteme. After this, the group breaks down into the trio of Smith on trumpet, Brown playing arco, and akLaff, playing toms, bongos and small percussion without keeping any regular pulse. akLaff responds directly to Smith’s rhythmic phrases and Wes Brown adds arco interjections and quickly moves to pizzicato, walking at times but never establishing a concrete pulse. Although brief, this solo section features Smith exploring the range of his horn and contains extreme dynamic contrast.
and contrasting densities of space.

After this brief solo, the main theme returns. Lake takes a fiery solo accompanied by Davis and akLaff now playing the entire drum set. The accompaniment is drawn from the supporting material, but becomes much more frenetic. Eventually Davis moves out of the harmonic language into atonal territory, improvising harmonies, while someone (Smith?) begins to accompany the performance on small percussion.

Davis then takes a brief unaccompanied solo, showcasing his ability to solo using both hands independently. Playing an ostinato in his right hand, he is able to channel Cecil Taylor’s atonal bass lines with left, also bringing to mind the abstraction of stride piano that he mentioned (see above) bringing to his performance on Smith’s Reflectactivity (1975). For a brief moment, he also demonstrates a thorough knowledge of McCoy Tyner’s quartal harmonies and pedal points, briefly conjuring Tyner’s modal playing with Coltrane. Throughout the solo, he demonstrates a melodicism and understanding of bebop language associated with Andrew Hill (an early influence) and Muhal Richard Abrams.19 In a display of symmetry, the piece ends as it began with Smith (instead of Lake) exhibiting some of his original extended techniques in a display of quiet virtuosity.

While these compositions fit perfectly with Smith’s aesthetic, they also presage the suite-like nature of Davis’ compositions on his debut album Song for

19 Abrams, Davis, Mal Waldron, and Barry Harris recorded a tribute to Thelonious Monk, with Don Cherry, Ed Blackwell, Roswell Rudd, and Monk sidemen Charlie Rouse, Ben Riley and Steve Lacy in 1981 released as Interpretations of Monk (1996). Davis’ set was introduced by Stanley Crouch.
The Old World (1978), especially his composition “An Anthem for the Generation that Died.” This piece has multiple sections with different rhythmic feels, including a gorgeous melodic section with a sophisticated use of functional harmony that calls to mind some of Keith Jarrett’s mid-1970s work, especially Shades (1975). After playing the initial iteration of the melody, Blackwell solos over the ensemble over the second iteration and trades short phrases as the theme is broken up by the band. This section is followed by an unaccompanied bass solo that allows Mark Helias to fully display his virtuosity, followed by a statement in unison of Hoggard and Davis of the introductory melody, ending with a fade out on the ominous vamp.

These two albums, Wadada Leo Smith’s Song of Humanity, and Davis’ own quartet debut Song for the Old World, present the clearest, most well defined examples of Davis’ writing during his New Haven period. Stylistically and conceptually diverse, they would provide a template for his extended compositional forms and opera writing in the 1980s.

Déjà Vu and Popular Black Eclecticism

In addition to the world music and more avant-garde traditions that these young musicians were in the process of discovering, a subset of this cohort was heavily involved in performing a fusion of more popular black musics. Déjà Vu was a band that saxophonist Dwight Andrews formed in 1975 with his fellow Detroiter, Pheeroan akLaff. Playing with Déjà Vu was Andrews and akLaff’s first regular performance opportunity in New Haven and would bring their playing to
the attention of the city’s wider music community. Other than Andrews and AkLaff, Déjà Vu featured among its members Brian “Jarawa” Gray on percussion, Yale student and son of cornetist Nat Adderley, Nat Adderley, Jr. on keyboards, and Wayne Boyd on guitar. Eventually, Jay Hoggard, then a student at Wesleyan, would make the trip down to perform with the group, eventually becoming a member.

Greg Tate writes of the 1970s that:

In the fusion moment you could go to venues like Howard University’s Cramton Auditorium and see Weather Report open for the afro-funk band Osibisa, or witness Billy Cobham’s Stratus unit on tour with P-Funk, or strangely enough, Bob Marley and the Wailers warming up the stage for Chick Corea’s band Return to Forever while future members of D.C.’s Rasta-punk pioneers Bad Brains sat taking notes on both. (Tate 2013: 219)

The 70s were a period where fusion and various admixtures of black music were still intensely popular nationwide and in the black community.

Déjà Vu was a group that was started in this era of “intracultural” freedom. akLaff describes the sound of the group as being influenced by many of the streams of black music that Tate describes:

It was very eclectic, yeah. It was very eclectic, because it would go all the way from a dainty Herbie Hancock slick harmony piece, to a hallelujah Donny Hathaway vibe, to political Bob Marley Reggae. It was way in there. It was WAY in there. And it really was a melting pot. I always say that because it was so broad that it soothed a longtime Yalie –Townie divide.

Our performances at the Afro-American Cultural Center presented by the director Khalid Lum, opened bridges for Yale students and the community of New Haven citizens in ways that might not have been done before.

(akLaff interview 2014)
Jay Hoggard describes the kind of repertoire that Déjà Vu played as well as the interest that the band created in New Haven’s black community:

Directly across on the corner is this place that was called the Robin’s Nest. And the Robin’s Nest was about somewhere between the size of this room [approximately 20ft by 30ft] right? And we played there every Friday and Saturday night, and that was like the neighborhood...’cause at that point Chapel Street was like the neighborhood even though Yale was right there. That was like the place where all the neighborhood people went. So we played Gil Scott-Heron tunes, Ronnie Laws...So where we were, if you thought of us as...Grover Washington, Ronnie Laws, we played the Earth Wind & Fire tunes. We played all that 70s R&B. (Hoggard interview 2014)

Eventually, after playing regularly at the Robin’s Nest, through Jay Hoggard’s connections, the group would go on to perform on bills with more established artists. Déjà Vu opened for saxophonist Grover Washington and singer Patti LaBelle at Wesleyan University, and for vibraphonist Roy Ayers at the University of New Haven, a performance during which the band played with particular enthusiasm (akLaff interview 2014, Hoggard interview 2014).

Although they never recorded commercially, one of the pieces in their repertoire, “Lovers” by keyboardist Nat Adderley, Jr. was recorded as the title track on what would be his uncle, Cannonball Adderley’s (1928-1975) final recording, Lovers (1976).

Some of the core members of the group would go on to play in New Dalta Ahkri and Anthony Davis’ various groups. Dwight Andrews and Pheeroan akLaff (along with Wes Brown and Bobby Naughton) would record together on Wadada Leo Smith’s 1979 Nessa release Spirit Catcher. Hoggard, akLaff, and Andrews would all become well known as musicians active in creative music and the avant-
garde. However, their experience with Déja Vu shows the diverse interests, and multiple musical lives of many young creative musicians in the 1970s. While Déja Vu only existed for a few years, the group’s sound would become an important precedent for akLaff and Hoggard’s more fusion and funk-oriented work for Gramavision in the 1980s (Hoggard interview 2014).

**Wildflowers**

Studio Rivbea, which Sam Rivers established in 1972, was (for the lofts) uncharacteristically well run and subsidized (Heller 2016:57). Rivbea also has the distinction of being the site of the 1976 recordings *Wildflowers*, the most comprehensive and best-known document of the loft period. Members of the New Haven scene Wadada Leo Smith, Pheeroan akLaff, George Lewis, Anthony Davis, and Michael Gregory Jackson are all featured on the set.

The LP set, which was issued over 5 volumes by Casablanca records, was recorded over the course of a week-long festival from May 14-23, 1976. However, the initial concept was much more involved and had the potential to produce a fuller picture of the activities of the loft scene. Producer Alan Douglas, best known for producing *Money Jungle*, Duke Ellington’s 1962 collaboration with Charles Mingus and Max Roach, initially wanted to place “a tape machine in several lofts for weeks at a time” (Shoemaker 2016). Michael Cuscuna, who was working at Arista producing Anthony Braxton at the time, helped set up the recording, suggesting a different approach. Bill Shoemaker writes:

*Instead, Cuscuna persuaded Douglas to collaborate with Rivers, then in the process of programming Studio Rivbea’s Spring Festival. Additionally,*
it was decided that the best performances would be gleamed for an anthology, and the tapes that failed to make the cut would be returned to the artists. Douglas decided to name the series Wildflowers after consulting a dictionary and to issue the series as five separately sold LPs, not as a box set. 20 (Shoemaker 2018)

Cuscuna’s idea, which was ultimately more practical and commercially viable than Douglas’ original, still came with a host of challenges. As Shoemaker points out, “Even though the logistics were simplified by using a single venue with a dedicated loft for recording, the task for the production team remained daunting; as 28 ensembles were scheduled to play over the course of two weekends, there were 28 opportunities for everything to go wrong in front of a paying audience” (Shoemaker 2018).

In order to properly record the festival for release on a major label, Rivers had to build a loft over the stage in order to accommodate multiple recording engineers and a battery of recording equipment. A 1976 review by Vladimir Simosko describes the chaotic scene, with the loft being occupied by a master control board, tape recorders and recording technicians, while the recessed, box-like bandstand became a maze of wires, microphones and (between sets) technicians adjusting microphones and levels for the next group. (1976:9)

Shoemaker also writes that many of the New York-based musicians active in the lofts felt that members of the Midwestern and Western collectives (as well as musicians from New Haven and Woodstock) were highly over-represented.

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20 Shoemaker, a well-respected critic who wrote the liner notes to Wadada Leo Smith’s 1983 release Rastafari, and was intimately familiar with the loft jazz and avant-garde scene in New York during the 1970s, relies on a mixture of investigation into the sessions and Vladimir Simosko’s original reporting.
This was due in large part to Michael Cuscuna’s involvement in putting together the festival. At the time, Cuscuna produced many of the artists featured on the sessions for Arista records. This was especially a point of contention given the level of success that many of these artists enjoyed during this period.

Arguably, [the predominance of artists signed to Arista Freedom performing as part of the festival], particularly when matched with the artists being championed in the local papers, fueled the perception that the media and record companies were cherry-picking the scene. This was particularly irksome for some factions of local musicians; many of the anointed musicians lived elsewhere—including Chicago, New Haven, Philadelphia and Woodstock, or had just blown in from St. Louis and California—and were not viewed as stakeholders in the loft movement. (Shoemaker 2018)

Though it was filled with excellent performances of ground-breaking music and the backing of Casablanca, an important independent label best-known during that period for its disco, funk, and rock offerings (Donna Summers, Parliament, KISS, were signed to the label, to name a few artists), it ultimately did not prove a commercial success. Shoemaker recounts:

The Wildflowers LPs were unceremoniously dumped into cut-out bins within a year of their release (neither Douglas nor Casablanca subsequently pursued similar projects). There are a number of reasons for this, the first being the heavy lifting for any label of marketing five individual LPs by a platoon of artists little known beyond the most hardcore jazz fans. Arguably, Casablanca was the most unsuited label for such an endeavor, despite—or because of—its pull in the pop and disco markets. (2018)

Nevertheless, despite its commercial failure, the set exists as one of the most important documents of the loft period. Certainly, it is the most professionally
produced and comprehensive document even if, due to time constraints, it paints a limited picture of the full activities of the loft scene.

Many of the musicians from the New Haven scene recall performing in the New York lofts as a special experience, and appreciated the freedom that it allowed them. However, the coding of the loft scene as a haven for unrestrained, under-rehearsed performance (akLaff interview 2016) eventually became an association that many chafed at. Heller describes the often-chaotic scene: “Loft Performances could be sloppily planned and sloppily executed. In an atmosphere of complete freedom, some players lacked discipline, leading to endless blowing and little evident musical direction” (2016:12).

He also describes how many musicians of the AACM (and by extension musicians who focused their energy on AACM-influenced compositional techniques) felt that more traditional concert settings were a better fit for their aesthetic and overall project. Heller writes: “[more established spaces for presenting experimental music like the Kitchen’s] emphasis on tracing the confluence of African American, Euro-American, and global experimentalist traditions was a closer match with the AACM ethos of putting pressure on insidious racialized boundary policing that can too often impede artistic mobility” (ibid. 74).

Perhaps, just as importantly, George Lewis makes the point that an association with the “loft jazz” scene was hurting musicians financially. He writes that in relation to “their commercial viability with European promoters” (Giddins 1977:76), “this label, by framing their music as requiring minimal infrastructural
investment, was used to disconnect them from more lucrative economic possibilities” (Lewis 2004a:70).

However, much of the dismissal of “loft jazz” as a label had to do with what was perceived as a crude attempt at creating a movement by lumping together a group of musicians who had developed diverse approaches to music, and different, even conflicting aesthetics. Anthony Davis, in particular, disliked being associated with the loft scene, stating that: “I never wanted to be identified in a group. I never liked that. I remember in the seventies, when I was part of loft jazz, I couldn’t stand it” (Davis interviewed by Van Cleve 1993:9).

**New Haven Connections to Downtown NYC and other Loft Scenes**

Despite his dislike of the “loft jazz” moniker, Anthony Davis and many other musicians in this New Haven cohort had a diverse range of formative experiences in the lofts of lower Manhattan. In addition to the influences that he internalized through his study of Carnatic music and love of Indonesian gamelan traditions, Anthony Davis was also influenced by his exposure to the experimental music being generated during that period in New York City’s downtown music scene. Davis claims that the music of Steve Reich and other minimalists was an influence on the development of his rhythmic language. Davis recounts his friendship with many of the musicians who would perform with Reich’s group, including Wesleyan grad student percussionist Bob Becker:

I was really close friends with [Reich violinist] Shem [Guibbory], and Jordi, he was a singer in [Reich’s ensemble]. I knew the singers in it and I knew [percussionist] Bob Becker who was in it. So I knew a lot of people in
the band. Nurit, Ed who were the pianists. So I went down when they first were rehearsing *Music for 18 Musicians*. (Davis interview 2014)

Davis’ experience of working in Rashied Ali’s group, studying in Wesleyan’s world music program, and venturing out to see friends playing with Steve Reich illustrates the breadth of his interests at the time, and is demonstrative of the diverse musical interests of many of the musicians in his New Haven cohort. Many of the musicians profiled in this chapter would make regular trips down to New York to see artists active in the loft scene. Gerry Hemingway recalls watching Anthony Davis performing in NYC during the “Wildflowers” sessions with Anthony Braxton (Hemingway interview 2015), an event that Davis describes as happening completely on the spot:

> Sometimes I brought my own group to play down there. Studio Rivbea. I sat in with Braxton there. It was on the record *Wildflowers*. I just came down to see George [Lewis], it was the first time George was playing there. And then while I was in the street, I saw Braxton. ‘Hey you wanna play?’ So that was my first time playing with Braxton. (Davis interview 2014)

Anthony Braxton’s impromptu collaboration with Davis would start an association that continued with Braxton’s well-regarded Antilles album *Six Compositions* (1982), which features Braxton performing his? Davis’s? compositions with Davis’ New Haven trio with Mark Helias on bass and Ed Blackwell on drums.

Mark Helias, who attended Yale as an MA performance major from 1974-76, also appears on Braxton’s Hat Hut release *Anthony Braxton Quintet (Basel) 1977* (2001) (along with George Lewis and Muhal Richard Abrams). Upon arrival in New Haven, Helias (b.1950), with his deeply rooted sense of swing and
command of the jazz tradition was an in-demand player. Gerry Hemingway recalls that playing with Mark Helias was his introduction to playing with someone who had mastered the art of the “straightforward groove, tipping thing.” Hemingway recalls: “Mark started playing 4/4 and I went ‘oh my god!’ I completely connected with him” (Hemingway interview 2014). Apparently Ed Blackwell, who knew something about hard-swinging bass players, was also sufficiently impressed. Helias would also continue his relationship with Blackwell until his passing in 1992, performing on and contributing two compositions to his final album, *What It Be Like, Volume 2* (1992).

Davis, through his friendship with Blackwell, spent a lot of time at Ornette Coleman’s Prince Street loft Artist House. He recalls that he would visit Blackwell at Wesleyan and drive him around, including into New York City for rehearsals with Coleman’s group. Through this connection he met Coleman and was able to spend a considerable amount of time with him. One particularly exciting experience that Davis recalls was an invitation by Blackwell to witness the rehearsals and recording sessions for Coleman’s legendary *Science Fiction* (1972) (Davis interview 2014).

Jay Hoggard describes the ubiquity of artist lofts during the era while pointing out the ahistorical nature of describing the 1970s as the “loft era”: So this business of the ‘loft era,’ we never thought of it that way. It was like, that was just the reality. Lofts were everywhere. A loft meant that someone moved in a dump building and had a bigger space, and renovated it and worked with it. (Hoggard interview 2014)

However, performing in lofts did seem to have had at least some impact on how
these young musicians learned to approach their instruments. In addition to producing an atmosphere conducive to experimentation, Pheeroan akLaff believes that the acoustics of the lofts changed the way that he approached the drums and chose equipment.

PA: Oh, yeah. Now that you bring it back to me. Yeah, it was a loft. It was kind of a big loft. I can’t believe I’m remembering something from that far back. I mean, I’m only partially remembering maybe the acoustics. Just that whole concept of playing…and then of course that’s how I played anyway. If I played in a big loft with glass and sheet rock and wooden floors. In most cases people had wooden floors, so that helped a lot. Yeah, my playing was sort of geared towards that, as was Wadada’s music. So, it was really interesting. I think I was lucky to find an opportunity to play really differently early on. I mean, really in a voice expressive way, and in a context that didn’t rely on the old drum set model.

SS: So that’s really interesting. What you’re saying is that you think that the acoustic environment of the loft had some kind of impact or influence on the way that you were approaching the drums.

PA: Yeah! Are you kidding?! As well as temples, and churches, and wherever else people were putting music on. (akLaff interview 2014)

akLaff elaborates:

But, in general, most loft spaces had a bit of a commercial real estate feel to them so the American drum set wouldn’t always have a good time in those places. So it made me choose different things for my instrument. And then as I was pretty sensitive to the acoustical settings, I made a lot of...guesstimations about what equipment to use when and where. I didn’t even...I was certainly not a geek about it, but I would put some thought into it...and I wish I had been more of a geek about it, but I put enough thought into it not to make a bad mistake... It would be interesting to hear
what those things sound like today... As far as recordings, Wadada’s music was not so difficult to record because it had very concert oriented notation or annotation. (ibid.)

The informality of the lofts also provided a space where musicians felt free to play in ways that were not hampered by the expectations of a club audience. As Jay Hoggard remembers:

(S)ome of my most happy moments were playing at [Studio] Rivbea... And then the other place that I played later, after I moved to New York was in Rashied’s place, Ali’s Alley, which was around the corner and down the block. But some of the happiest moments, the least stressed, and most purely musical moments were there in Ali’s Alley. (Hoggard interview 2014)

Additionally, the lofts were an important venue for experimentation for musicians of multiple generations. George Lewis recalls various highly experimental performances at Studio Rivbea:

Everybody learned all kinds of things from that. That was a great experience. I played there several times and presented these kind of compositions. Some of them had graphic elements and some of them had sort of strange attempts at creating sonorities. It could have been anything. You take a vibraphone and hold the pedal down, and you just poured popcorn on it. (Lewis interviewed by Soltes 1997:66)

Although some argue that the “loft jazz” label (especially the jazz part) was restrictive (Lewis 2004a:70), the openness of the loft scene allowed these musicians to experiment with unconventional sounds and concepts, and create ensembles that would have never been able to perform in traditional venues.

Michael Gregory Jackson also remembers the loft era as an exciting era when musicians were open to new collaborations.
[Around 1975] I started going down and playing a lot with Oliver and so many people, it was that whole ‘loft scene,’ New York was really on fire, everyone was collaborating. We were doing work with Ntozake Shange, the poet, and Jess Hagedorn, and Thulani Davis. There was a lot of places, La Mama, you had Rashied Ali’s place, Sam Rivers’ loft, (Jackson interview 2017)

While presenting jazz in artist lofts is primarily thought of as a New York City phenomenon, there were loft spaces throughout the Northeast in the early 1970s. As mentioned earlier, Real Art Ways in Hartford, Connecticut, was an active performance space at the time, and Anthony Davis describes a network of lofts and gallery spaces in the Northeast, stretching into Canada. Davis describes his experience playing in lofts with Leo Smith’s various versions of his group New Delta Ahkri:

We started really doing more concerts, we played Real Art Ways, we played New Haven. Then Oliver and Pheeroan joined the group so that was probably later like in 74. Then we started touring, we toured Canada, we played concerts in New York. We did concerts in....I think we did Woodstock again. We did Toronto. There was a place called A Space in Toronto... We didn’t play clubs, mostly different kinds of lofts. (Davis interview 2014)

Michael Gregory Jackson also recalls Syd Smart’s “Loft of the friends of Great Black Music” in Boston as an important staging ground for the avant-garde of that city. Jackson remembers meeting many musicians and performing often in Smart’s loft in the early 1970s before moving to New York.

**Other Venues**

In addition to their performances at Real Art Ways, the Robin’s Nest, and
various loft spaces, another important venue for this scene was the Educational Center for the Arts in New Haven. Many of the subjects of this dissertation taught at the Educational Center for the Arts in various musical situations. Jay Hoggard, Anthony Davis, Michael Gregory Jackson and Pheeroan akLaff all taught music classes there in the mid 1970s, which akLaff remembers as being a formative pedagogical experience (akLaff interview 2014). Gerry Hemingway also played Ghanaian percussion with Wesleyan professor Freeman Donkor for Donkor’s Ghanaian dance class at the school. Davis and Hoggard performed a series at ECA playing the music of different composers in 1977, including concerts dedicated to the music of Thelonious Monk, Duke Ellington, and John Coltrane. The New Haven musicians would still perform at the venue well after many of them had moved to New York, with Anthony Davis’ Episteme ensemble performing at the school in 1981 (“Night Sounds-In Concert” 1981:C4). Other New Haven venues included the Space, the Gallery, and the Foundry Café, next door to Foundry Books at 104 Audobon St. (“New Haven Restaurant Owner” 1992). As mentioned earlier the Gallery was the site for Smith’s album Song of Humanity (1976).

In addition to these local galleries and performance spaces, there were numerous performance opportunities on the college circuit around New England. Advent, the group composed of Davis, Lewis, Hemingway, Wes Brown, and Hal Lewis, performed between 1973 and 1976 at Cornell, Bowdoin, Wheaton, the University of Connecticut, and various locations at Yale University. According to Anthony Davis, during that period there were plenty of opportunities to perform
both in established venues and university housing.

Actually, my own group...I was able to get kind of a New England touring thing. So, I was able to do concerts at colleges. So I had a whole college network. Sometimes with Pheeroan and Rick [Rozie], and sometimes with (Ed) Blackwell and Mark [Helias]. (Davis interview 2014)

Hoggard, who was also a member of that group, which in its Helias/Blackwell configuration would record Anthony Davis’ Song for The Old World (1978) on India Navigation, explains further:

We played at these...Alpha Delt used to have concerts. [Bassist] Wes [Brown], I think might have run the concert series at [Wesleyan fraternity house] Alpha Delt. The same as these guys play all these gigs, back then there were more gigs, man. I mean, they were paying 20 dollars, 50 dollars, but it’s a little something...a 50 dollar gig was killing it, you know? (Hoggard interview 2014)

**Conclusion**

A diverse cohort of young composer/improvisers would collaborate to create a vibrant scene in the New Haven area. Although some of these young musicians only spent a few years in New Haven, for many, the connections that they made during that period endure to the present. Also during this period, the multi-generational, multi-ethnic CMIF was founded by Wadada Leo Smith, Bobby Naughton, Wes Brown, and Gerry Hemingway. The CMIF was a new model for a creative music collective loosely based on the AACM that was not racially exclusive.

More established artists in the area, such as Wadada Leo Smith and Ed Blackwell, acted in many ways as mentors to the younger musicians in the cohort
introducing them to various world music traditions as well as earlier jazz recordings. Beyond his musical education, Smith embodied the value of personal self-definition and self-determination through self produced solo concerts and recordings. Through the CMIF he would more formally show younger musicians how to produce their own concerts and recordings.

Eventually, these young musicians would begin studying world traditions from master musicians through Wesleyan’s newly formed world music program. Ultimately, they would begin composing and seeking to individuate themselves in different ways. Gerry Hemingway in particular used his solo concerts, which incorporated avant-garde visual elements and literary references, to create an individual identity.

The connection of these New Haven-based musicians to the New York loft scene in many ways would prepare them for their eventual exodus to New York and more active participation in that scene. The narrative of these musicians during the early and mid 1970s in some ways problematizes the dominant New York City-centric portrayal of the loft era. Not only were there lofts up and down the East Coast, but quite a few of the important musicians who would perform in downtown New York lofts came from rather far outside of the city.

The participation of many of these young musicians in both popular and avant-garde music spheres also complicates the narrative of what Greg Tate describes as “intracultural segregation of black pop and black jazz,” especially in relation to African American improvised music. The role that rhythmic concepts from African and Indian music would play in the development of Anthony Davis
and other creative musicians of this cohort in the 1980s was crucial. However, the strong background in funk and R&B that Pheeroan akLaff and other artists of this cohort cultivated would add another vital element to the sound of many creative music groups going forward. Additionally, the pan-African philosophy and interest in the African retentions of diasporic culture that was being theorized at Yale would allow artists like Anthony Davis to create a conceptual framework that would allow Davis to combine all of these musics into a unified whole. Davis would combine both R&B and traditional African musical concepts on albums like *Hemispheres*, a project which was influenced by Yoruba mythology and featured liner notes by Henry Louis Gates.

This oft-neglected scene in jazz and creative music history began to address many concepts and issues related to the music that continue to be relevant today. The 1970s were a period when there was an unprecedented interest in a vast array of world musics, new black popular musics, and expanded compositional techniques. The young composer/improvisers of the New Haven scene participated in all of these developments and this period continues to be an influence on their musical and scholarly lives.

Like the New Haven scene, Creative Music Studio (CMS), located in Woodstock, NY, was a hotbed of genre-defying musical activity. Influenced by the experimentalism of the 1960s creative music collectives and intercultural improvisation, the aesthetic of CMS closely paralleled the music making happening during the same period in New Haven. Among the many young musicians who spent time at the school in the 1970s and 80s include Marilyn Crispell (b.1947), Peter Apfelbaum (b.1960), John Lindberg (b.1959), Bill Laswell (b.1955), John Zorn (b.1953), Sylvain Leroux (b.1956), Tom Cora (b.1953) and Steven Bernstein (b.1961).

In this chapter, I look at the development of CMS and its impact on creative music in the 1970s. I focus on the connections between CMS, the New Haven scene, and the many collectives whose members were guiding artists at the CMS. I also examine the ways in which the artists of CMS dealt with new approaches to silence, listening, and intercultural improvisation. I explore the influence of Ornette Coleman’s theory of Harmolodics as an egalitarian structuring device for the interactions between this diverse cohort of guiding artists and students, and related to Coleman’s theory, I look at the impact of Don Cherry’s philosophy on the overall philosophy and direction of the school. I finish by examining the influence of CMS on the development of conducted improvisation.

Marion Brown, who was a catalyst for Wadada Leo Smith’s move to New Haven, also introduced Karl Berger to Woodstock and its musical community.
Woodstock, with its vibrant music and arts scene and idyllic natural setting, seemed to be a perfect fit for Berger and other musicians trying to escape the hustle and bustle of New York City. Berger recalls:

Marion Brown [the saxophonist] brought me up here...He's also one of those mystical fellows, who, when they appear [you know] something is in the works. He introduced me to a few people up here. This was pretty much the only country place I knew around New York. (Sweet 2013b:65)

Berger, who moved to New York after some years of working in Don Cherry's group throughout Europe, by his own account, never particularly liked living in the city.

I'm not a city person, I'm coming from a small town and there's too much noise...It's just like there are too many options. There's too many options, people look at their watches like, ‘What could I do next?’ (Berger interview 2014)

Unlike other locations in the Catskills, Woodstock already had an active music and arts scene, hosting the iconic festival in 1969 that would become the primary reference point for the town in the American imagination. Small Town Talk (2016) details the importance of Woodstock to rock music history, including events that preceded the 1969 festival and Karl Berger's introduction to the town.

In experimental music, Woodstock was perhaps best known as the site of the premiere of Cage's 4’33” at Maverick Concert Hall, sponsored by the Woodstock Artists Association in 1952 (Hermes 2000). Within the town the piece was controversial, as Alex Ross relates: “Someone reportedly hollered ‘Good people of Woodstock, let’s drive these people out of town!’” (Ross 2015).

Also predating Berger’s arrival in Woodstock was the presence of the
Aboriginal Music Society, a group composed of Juma Sultan and percussionist Ali Abuwi formed in the Woodstock area in the mid-60s. It began as part of 212 Intermedia: a multi-arts workshop (Farina 2012:26). The Aboriginal Music Society would recruit many accomplished musicians active in the New York avant-garde to perform with the group. Some of the more well-known musicians who collaborated with the group were pianist Dave Burrell (b.1940), drummer Sunny Murray (b.1936), and saxophonist Robin Kenyatta (1942-2004) (ibid. 26-27).

Michael Heller writes about the countercultural influence of this group on the New York loft scene, describing some of the activities of Group 212 Intermedia’s workshop:21

In this case, the influence [of Woodstock-based musicians on the NYC loft scene of the 1970s] may be even more direct, as a number of early loft players had previously been involved in artists’ colonies near the counterculture mecca of Woodstock, New York...Members of [Group 212] were central to organizing the influential ‘Sound Out’ festivals of 1968, which were an important precursor to the better-known Woodstock rock festival in 1969. (2016:120)

As Heller (2012: 6) points out, Sultan performed on homemade percussion with Jimi Hendrix during the 1969 festival before moving back to New York in the early 1970s. The music that Sultan describes performing with the Aboriginal

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21 The term “intermedia” is associated with members of the NYC-based collective Fluxus (Higgins 2003) and 212 is the NYC area code. Sultan moved to Woodstock from New York City so the exchange of influences between NYC and Woodstock was an ongoing and constant process.
Music Society also sounds remarkably similar to the kind of intercultural collaborations that would transpire at the CMS. Sultan recalls: “it was classified as avant-garde....it was a fusion of African rhythms along with music concepts from around the world including Western concepts...it was influenced by all kinds of people from Ornette Coleman to Don Cherry” (in Farina 2012 28-29).

Berger, who had been working on music that similarly incorporated concepts from around the world into an avant-garde sensibility with Don Cherry, recalls some of the attributes that immediately attracted him to Woodstock:

I think Woodstock was just offering itself as the one place that was not suburban, that had its own center, that had its own tradition, had an artistic tradition. And also, Woodstock is the fourth largest accumulation of recording studios in the US. (Berger interview 2014)

In 1967, Berger obtained a position at the New School University, teaching experimental music, a position that John Cage held from 1956-1960 (Kuhn 2004). However, as Berger explains, his idea of experimentalism, influenced by his experiences working with Don Cherry’s quintet and the leading African American experimentalists of the 1960s, was much different than Cage’s:

the New School happened...that started in ’67. When John Cage left the New School, I heard about that John Cage was leaving. He was doing a class, he didn’t call it improvisation as you know, he called it “chance,” or something, or whatever. Because he didn’t want to get identified with jazz improvisation, he was always very worried about that! He didn’t want us to get onto his turf! (ibid.)

Although Berger and Cage had radically different musical philosophies in many ways...

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22 Kuhn explains that “From 1950 until 1956, [Cage] was invited to take part in academic discussions and to undertake performances of his works by fellow composer, critic, and faculty member, Henry Cowell” (Kuhn 2004).
ways, Cage would become more or less of a regular fixture at the Creative Music Studio, thanks in large part to his appreciation of the music of Ornette Coleman.

As Berger recalls,

I went to John Cage, and John Cage’s answer was, ‘I don’t like jazz, but I like Ornette.’ So he joined. So he worked with us. And then it turned out when he came up and worked with us that he was really communicative and it was fine. (ibid.)

Starting out

Berger points to 1971 as the year that the Creative Music Foundation was created. However, one of the first nationally-advertised classes at CMS, featuring a small advertisement in Down Beat Magazine, did not come until 1975.23 From the beginning, CMS was a highly utopian project. According to Berger, Ornette Coleman even suggested that he enlist architects and artists to be part of the project. Originally conceptualized as a holistic, multi-arts program, to be modeled after Black Mountain College, CMS ultimately became a school for music with the goal of combining education in jazz, classical, and world musics.

Berger describes Coleman’s original eclectic vision for the school.

(W)hen I talked to Ornette about first starting CMS he said we should have an advisory board which John Cage is on, Buckminster Fuller, Willhem De Koening, who else did he say? He wanted Gil Evans. (Berger interview 2014)

While Coleman and Berger were unable to realize the organization on the scale that Coleman had initially suggested, based on interpersonal relationships they

were able to secure many of the top experimentalists from a variety of traditions. Many of the earliest instructors were drawn from the AACM, BAG, and other collectives on the cutting-edge of jazz and creative music.

The name CMS itself was influenced by Leo Smith’s own use of the term “creative music,” as Berger explains:

I know that the first guy to use the expression ‘creative music’ was Leo Smith. He had an Orchestra called Creative Music Orchestra, I think it was in Connecticut...Essentially what was meant by the term was to emphasize creativity as compared to routine. That was it. . . . in this world where everybody thinks in kind of material terms, people think, ‘oh, you’re talking about a new kind of music.’ That would be completely counter to our whole philosophy. It’s about creativity within music and style really is not the point . . . basically it’s a term that’s not supposed to define anything particularly. It’s supposed to open up things rather than closing down. (Berger interview 2014)

The adoption of the term “creative music” by Berger would lead to an eventual shift in the usage of the term, bringing it from its use by Smith and others in the African American community (often in the context of “creative black music”) into a more universal context. I have discussed this before (Sonderegger 2014), as has Adam Tinkle, using Paul Gilroy’s formulation of “strategic universalism.” Tinkle describes Berger’s philosophy (as well as the CMS philosophy more broadly:

For our purposes here, along with Sweet’s many citations of CMS alums discussing the ‘universal’ musical principles that were taught there, among the most important of Berger’s discursive investments in strategic universalism is his forwarding of the notion of music as language, and particularly, as an improvisation-based ‘universal language.’ (Tinkle 2015: 242)
Leo Smith and other musicians used the term as a way to get outside of the racialized connotations that the word “jazz” had acquired by the 1960s and 70s, and highlight the centrality of creativity in African American culture.\textsuperscript{24} However, Berger’s definition of creative music as “a term that’s not supposed to define anything particularly...[that’s] supposed to open up things rather than closing down,” would function in a much different, more universalist context, popularizing the term outside of its association with the AACM.

By 1975, quite a few musicians from the downtown New York loft scene had also moved up to Woodstock, including Anthony Braxton (who had lived in the city with Coleman), Jack DeJohnette (b.1942), and Dave Holland (who played in Braxton’s group at the time). Between his connections to the scene in New York and the burgeoning local scene in Woodstock, Berger had quite a few of the more prominent creative musicians of the 1970s to draw from. Even though CMS would become a more official and efficiently run organization (eventually granting visas for students), the hiring process for instructors remained highly informal.

According to Berger, musicians would simply congregate at Ornette Coleman’s Prince Street loft space and hold a discussion to determine who was available. In the following conversation, Berger recalls the informal process of recruiting from a rich pool of top conceptualists:

\textbf{SS:} for the first couple CMS intensives, who picked the artists? Were they friends of yours, or Ornette’s? How did you decide who would teach for

\textsuperscript{24} The document where Smith most fully articulates his philosophy of creative music, \textit{notes (8 pieces)} (1973), is dedicated to the author Addison Gayle, editor of \textit{The Black Aesthetic} (1972).
the first couple ones?
KB: Well, the ones who lived in Woodstock. Anthony [Braxton], and Dave [Holland]. Everybody that lived there was teaching, Jack DeJohnette. So we had, like, top artists already. And then they would suggest people and it would just build from there. Bobby Moses lived here and it was just like...
SS: So for example: Anthony Braxton would like recommend George Lewis or Wadada Leo Smith?
KB: Anthony made the connection to the AACM.
SS: So he connected those people up with the [CMS].
KB: Yeah, like Ornette had Saturday night meetings at Prince street where literally all the guys that we needed showed up. Leroy Jenkins would be there. Like everybody would show up!
SS: So he’d just call a meeting...?
KB: There was no meeting it was like open house.
SS: Yeah, Artists House...
KB: We were playing pool and hanging out on the weekends at Ornette’s and you would meet everybody there. And people would say this guy and that guy and dadada and it just happened. (Berger interview 2014)
The importance of Ornette Coleman’s loft and the scene that developed around it cannot be understated in relation to the CMS. According to Berger, the initial stages of planning the workshop began with Ornette Coleman’s lessons to Berger and others about his own musical system.

Essentially, what happened was, we met with Ornette quite a bit and he talked to us about harmolodics, his approach to organizing music, and my feeling was that we should start a non-profit organization. Of course that comes from my European background, thinking in those terms...The European art tradition is that art is being subsidized by people, not just being marketed as if it was another product, because that never made sense to me. How can you expect that people buy a lot of records of a
music that didn’t even exist until then? And that they don’t even know anything about! You can not really expect that to sell huge numbers of records! (laughs) No way. So I just feel that innovation, just like in industry, needs to be subsidized. With a goal, and the goal cannot be to sell a lot of records, the goal should be to further the music. And the music sort of has a value of its own, so to speak. (Berger interview 2014)

While Berger wanted to rely on government support, Coleman took a more capitalist approach. A view perhaps based on the commercial and critical success (mixed to be sure) that he had occasionally enjoyed as an artist in the United States, no mean feat considering the uncompromising and innovative nature of his music.

Ornette, of course, being American, wasn’t really totally following me on that idea. He said, ‘Ok. We’ll do that, but you do the non-profit, I’ll do the profit!’... he was already successful with his stuff. His stuff was happening, so we said, ‘Let’s go both ways.’ And I met Carla Bley and Mike Mantler, who had one of the first New Music non-profits, the New Music Distribution and the JCOA. The Jazz Composers Orchestra, which was also a non-profit. ...and they had an office on Broadway and there was a little room available, so we moved in and used that as our office to get started. (ibid.)

The JCOA, which was created in the wake of the dissolution of the Jazz Composers Guild, would become a vital creative outlet for composers active in both the New Haven and Woodstock scenes. Recall that Clifford Thornton’s collaboration with Abraham Adzenyeh, The Gardens of Harlem (1975), was performed by the Jazz Composers Orchestra and released on their own label.

The Jazz Composers’ Orchestra also featured the work of many musicians who

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25 See Piekut (2011) for a detailed examination of the Jazz Composers Guild.
would attend CMS.

Carla Bley (b.1936), a prominent member and organizer within the JCOA, also moved to Woodstock in the mid-1970s, and would become a CMS guiding artist. Several important intercultural large ensemble recordings, including Don Cherry’s ground breaking *Relativity Suite* (1973), were recorded by the Jazz Composers Orchestra. New Music Distribution, controlled by Bley and her partner Michael Mantler, was also a major distributor for other artists’ self-released albums, including Leo Smith’s Kabell recordings. Berger and other members of Don Cherry’s 1965 quintet, including Cherry and Gato Barbieri, also appeared on Bley’s recordings, including the epic opera released on JCOA Records, *Escalator Over the Hill* (1971).

**CMS and its Relationship to The New Haven Scene**

Although Robert Sweet states that CMS was “a unique endeavor” (Sweet 1996:14), and many participants that I spoke to stressed its exceptional nature, it is also important to understand the school as part of a larger scene of creative music education and theorization. Not only did New Haven musicians have important overlaps with CMS conceptually, but some of them functioned as guiding artists at the CMS. In particular, Wadada Leo Smith was a CMS instructor on a number of occasions, bringing his group with Anthony Davis and Wes Brown during one of the early sessions (Davis interview 2014).

At CMS, Marilyn Crispell, a pianist who would go on to become a member of Anthony Braxton’s 1980s quartet (the group profiled in Graham Locke’s *Forces*
In Motion, met Smith, Davis and Brown. Crispell, who moved to Woodstock to study and teach at CMS, would make the trek to New Haven numerous times to perform with Smith after their initial introduction. She would also meet Gerry Hemingway briefly during her time in New Haven (Crispell interview 2016).

For Marilyn Crispell, her studies with Smith and introduction to the other members of the ensemble were an important early experience for her. She recalls:

[Smith] wrote a particular piece for me, called ‘Sanctuary,’ which I no longer have for whatever reason. It’s out there in the cosmos somewhere I guess, and he talked a lot about his way of composing. He had been laid up with some illness for a long time, and while he was sick he had a lot of time to think about things and he came up with this idea of sound balanced by an equal amount of silence. (ibid.)

Smith recalls being an instructor at CMS multiple years. He also recalls the eclectic nature of the guiding artists:

we were hired to go into Woodstock and to teach let’s say 5 days, and that would be during a session, and each session was exclusive, meaning that there’d be a collective of teachers who would teach these classes during that session and let’s say a session ran seven days or two weeks or whatever, and then it would change. They also brought quite a bit of players in from different backgrounds, from Lee Konitz to whoever you can think of. (Smith interview 2015)

Anthony Davis recalls that “the route between New Haven and Woodstock became a familiar one” (Davis interview 2014). Not only were Davis, Smith, Lewis and others in New Haven recruited as guiding artists, but some New Haven musicians attended as performers. For example, Pheeroan akLaff was introduced to CMS through a performance that he and his ensemble with Michael Gregory Jackson and Anthony Davis presented in the late 1970s. Ed Blackwell, while he
was an instructor at Wesleyan, was also a guiding artist and frequent guest. Additionally, Oliver Lake, a member of the Black Artists Group, and Smith’s New Haven-based ensembles in the mid 70s, was a guiding artist at the school. The first (and only thus far) volume of archival material released from the CMS tapes (Archive Selections, Vol.1: 2014), features a 1976 performance of Lake and Michael Gregory Jackson performing with the CMS orchestra.

**CMS approach to Intercultural Improvisation**

In contrast to the New Haven creative music community that operated at the margins of a highly structured university system, CMS was loosely organized around the activity of Berger and his associates. While a significant part of both scenes revolved around intercultural music-making, the musicians representing various world traditions at CMS were much more likely to have a background in jazz or outside of the traditional music of their home countries than the teaching artists at Wesleyan, who were primarily specialists in their home tradition.

One artist who exemplified this tendency was Babatunde Olatunji (1927-2003). Although Olatunji collaborated with some of the most innovative American jazz and creative musicians in the 1960s, including Max Roach, Yusef Lateef, and John Coltrane, and introduced a distinctive version of pan-African drumming to the US in the 1950s with “Drums of Passion,” he is not regarded as a deeply grounded authoritative traditional drummer by many in the West African drumming community. In Olatunji’s autobiography Eric Charry notes that Olatunji, whose greatest strength was as a personality and organizer, “was
groomed, not as a drummer (a skill that is usually kept within certain family
lineages in the region where he grew up), but rather to follow in his father’s
footsteps as a village leader” (2005:3).

Other CMS teachers who did have a strong background in their non-western home traditions were interested in other world traditions. Nana
Vasconcelos, who was highly proficient in various Brazilian musics and is
regarded as an important practitioner of the berimbau de barriga (Galm 2010),
took particular interest in learning other traditions. For example, in a 1976
performance Vasconcelos can be seen performing on the North Indian tabla with
Don Cherry’s ensemble. According to Berger, Nana Vasconcelos was particularly
interested in Berger’s gamala taki system because it was so much different from
the way that he had learned music. Most, if not all, of the artists teaching world
traditions at Wesleyan during the 1970s would not have been comfortable playing
something so far outside of their tradition. Indeed, musicians at CMS were
encouraged to learn material from far outside of their tradition. Karl Berger
relates that when Brazilian percussionist Cyro Baptista first attended CMS,

The first day he was encouraged to play a complicated odd-meter rhythm,
ever having encountered such a thing before. ‘It was the shock of his life,’
Mr. Berger said. ‘He entered into a whole new world.’ (Ratliff 2008)

Adam Rudolph (b. 1955), a percussionist who taught at CMS and
performed with Don Cherry, encapsulates how the CMS approach differed from
more mainstream educational environments, emphasizing that the creative
attitude that was communicated at CMS was more important than learning the
specifics of any one tradition.
I’ve taught at many schools. It’s hard. The institutional approach brings by definition with it a certain calcification and formality that just doesn’t invite the free-wheeling approach that CMS took. The most important part that we shared wasn’t even the information. Of course, the information is important. Let’s say, I teach this Afro-Cuban rhythm, I learn the particular Turkish scale, what’s most important is the creative attitude. (Rudolph and Berger, n.d.)

The focus at CMS was more on collaboration between improvisers than on teaching traditional musics in any kind of structured manner. Accordingly, many of the American creative musicians collaborated with their international counterparts without learning any of the specific mechanics of their traditions. Like the New Haven scene during the same time period, the study of world traditions and intercultural improvisation would be important for many of the students and guiding artists of CMS. However, unlike the more formal model of study that many young musicians in the New Haven scene took advantage of at Wesleyan, the emphasis at CMS seemed to be on facilitating intercultural collaboration, primarily focused around improvisation.

Marilyn Crispell states that although she performed with Babatunde Olatunji and other African musicians, she never learned any West African drumming traditions. However, even though she never studied with Olatunji, and had no knowledge of the musical tradition that he emerged from, the two musicians had a great rapport.

Olatunji was there and we ended up doing duo concerts together. One in New York...because he heard me playing and he said, ‘I understand what you’re trying to do, let’s play together.’ So, we did a duo concert at Soundscape in New York City, and all of his relatives came, and we did
some traditional songs and some pure improvisation, and they all came to love it. (Crispell interview 2016)

Although they played some songs based on African melodies and rhythms, Crispell felt that the “most effective music that we played was the totally improvised stuff” (ibid.).

It is instructive to compare the collaborations of Clifford Thornton and Marion Brown to the intercultural experiments of CMS. In contrast to the intercultural collaborations that took place between Abraham Adzenyah and members of the creative music scene in Connecticut and New York City, many of the collaborations at CMS were much more open-ended. While Brown and Thornton’s projects were guided by their interest in African culture and desire to incorporate African rhythms and functionality into their music in a way that all musicians could square with their own aesthetic backgrounds, the collaborations of the musicians at CMS were often about finding common ground through improvisation, regardless of the background of the improvisers.

Peter Apfelbaum describes how the open-mindedness of musicians from all traditions at CMS allowed for an environment that fostered new ways of intercultural improvisation that de-centered the primacy of any one tradition:

CMS, at that time, was unique in that they were dealing with improvisation first, and quote un-quote jazz was a sub-group of that but there were all these other systems. You got away from the really orthodox, traditional systems like in all of these particular musics and you had a chance to be with, like we did, people that were open-minded and into collaborating, then you realized that you had a lot in common, because you could improvise together. (Apfelbaum interview 2016a)

Guided by Berger’s “strategic universalism,” projects such as Codona (the
cooperative trio of Don Cherry, Colin Walcott, and Nana Vasconcelos), Marilyn Crispell’s duets with Babatunde Olatunji, and the various informal improvisation sessions that took place were highly variable in their content and fidelity to any one musical tradition. This is not to suggest that none of the musicians at CMS were versed in musics other than jazz and European classical. While Berger, by his own admission, had never studied any world traditions in any depth, Don Cherry had studied a variety of African traditions and had spent time throughout the continent (Mandel 1998, Rudolph interview 2014, Berger interview 2015), including learning to play the donso ngoni, a hunter’s harp, while in Mali (Lander in Kernahan, et. al 2010:134). Ed Blackwell, as mentioned in Chapter 2, had collaborated with Abraham Adzenyah, and learned a variety of Ghanaian drumming patterns, in addition to the many Afro-diasporic styles he had picked up during his musical training in New Orleans, Los Angeles, and New York. A 1975 *Down Beat* article describes the kind of hybrid African-influenced music created by the trio of Berger, Cherry and Blackwell.

As an example, when Don visited Karl Berger at his Woodstock studio during his recent visit here from Sweden, he brought along a newly acquired balophon (sic), an instrument like the marimba but larger, using hollow gourds as resonators. Reunited with his old bandmates, Karl and drummer Ed Blackwell, Don led the three of them into an impromptu jam session of balaphon and marimba that, aside from providing insight into the percussive foundation of jazz, produced some of the sweetest music in any idiom. Surely the music was jazz, but it was being played solely on instruments that would not have been considered jazz instruments a decade ago. (Ochiogrosso 1975: 14)

Ochiogrosso doesn’t describe the music, but listening to other
collaborations between Blackwell and Cherry, such as their duo *Mu* (1971), in the collaborative quartet *Old and New Dreams* (1977), or Blackwell, Cherry and Berger on *Cherry’s Symphony for Improvisers* (1966), may give some insight into what transpired between the three improvisers. Their collaboration, which involves drawing from a multiplicity of cultural influences and involves both non-western and Western instruments, confounds even Ochiogrosso’s definition of the music as “jazz,” and offers a window into the kind of experimentation that was common at CMS.

**Relationship between Woodstock and the New York Loft Scene**

Although Berger cites the importance of his teaching at the New School, his approach to pedagogy was also shaped by another experience that he had while still living in New York City. In the late 1960s, Berger became a member of a group formed with the main purpose of performing for students in the public school system. This group featured some of the more important creative musicians of the era.

the New School was one aspect that led to CMS and the other one was playing in schools. I played in a program called, ‘Young Audiences.’ We had a band with Reggie Workman, Sam Rivers. And Horace Arnold was the leader. So we played. We basically played like twice, three times a week. And we were playing like three concerts a day. (Berger interview 2014)

Not only were these musicians all excellent improvisers, but Rivers and Workman in particular were engaged in pedagogy and in actively creating a strong collective scene in lower Manhattan. Workman was involved in Creative
Black Artists (Porter 2002: 235) during this period. And, as mentioned in Chapter 2, Rivers would host, in the 1970s, one of the most important venues (along with Rashied Ali’s loft Ali’s Alley) for presenting the new music of the loft scene, Studio RivBea.

Rivers, Workman and Berger would all become important creative music pedagogues in their own right. Rivers would briefly teach at Wesleyan University from 1970-73, and Workman would teach at the University of Massachusetts between 1971 and 1974 (Porter 2002:235), and many years later, head the Jazz and Contemporary Music program at the New School. Berger and Workman have continued their radically intuitive approaches to teaching music making until the present era. These early pedagogical experiences for the improvisers, which in many ways were as loosely regulated as the program at CMS, must have been formative. Berger describes the loose, ad-hoc nature of the Young Audiences public school program (VanTrikt 2007: 19), which was called “What is Improvisation?”:

‘What is Improvisation?’ So we would just say, ‘What is improvisation?’ and the kids would say, ‘Uh, you make up the music.’ And then we said, ‘Would you want us to make up some music for you’ and the kids would say, ‘Yeah!!’ and then somebody would say, so they would say, ‘Would you have an idea of what we should be improvising on? ‘and then one kid would come up with a melody. He’d come up on stage and sing it and we would, like, play it and then we would improvise. And then, ‘Did you recognize the melody? And which part was improvised and which part was not?,’ and that was it. 40 minutes. (Berger interview 2014)

Berger also describes how he led students to develop simple motives that became the basis for improvisation by Berger and the rest of the ensemble.
“I realized that sixth-graders (at that time) showed an amazingly open mind to all kinds of improvisational materials and came up with very surprising input of their own. We worked with them on improvisation in very general, non-stylistic terms and got them creatively involved in formulating thematic materials to improvise from” (in Van Trikt 2007:19).

While the open-ended nature of the program seems somewhat unwieldy and a distinct product of the late 1960s, the opportunity to listen to four master improvisers for 40 minutes must have been a powerful experience for the young listeners. Furthermore, in its focus on encouraging young students to develop skills like thinking critically about improvisation and distinguishing between improvisation and composition, the program was far ahead of its time.

**Getting out of NYC**

While Woodstock is only 100 miles from New York City (or a “2 CD commute” according to Karl Berger), many CMS guiding artists and participants speak of how the distance from NYC and the physical setting of the area allowed musicians to engage with one another differently than they were able to in the city. Robert Sweet writes:

The physical beauty of Woodstock and the surrounding Catskills is undeniable. The mountains are not dramatic or majestic like the Rockies or the Alps. The steep, rocky, rough, wooded hillsides have an aura of enchantment. Everywhere there are streams, brooks, and rivulets of different sizes. Sloping meadows and the flat plains of the Hudson Valley to the east make it an area of contrast. There’s some sort of magic there. (Sweet 1996:41)
From the beginning, CMS was set up as a positive, relaxed environment that was designed in contradistinction to the situation in New York that horrified Berger when he arrived. Berger remembers arriving in NYC:

It was the shock of my life. I looked so forward to get into the musicians here. The shock of my life. I hated the food. I loved the people here. We met the most beautiful people here. But I hated the food, and I found out that coming from Europe, the musicians that you adore in Europe are superstars, but when you come here... The first person I approached on the Lower East Side was a famous saxophone player, whose name I don’t want to mention, who asked us for some money to buy a mouthpiece. (Panken 2008)

One aspect of CMS that Marilyn Crispell found especially significant was the natural environment. Because the surroundings and overall situation was so different from New York City it led to a completely different relationship between participants.

The thing about CMS was kind of the human element of it. It was not just about music, but here you were in this country setting, in this relaxed setting where you could actually talk with master musicians and sit down and have dinner with them. It wasn’t like being in the city, you know? It was ok to be in their space, you didn’t feel like you were intruding because that was what they were there for, that kind of thing. And there was health food, and Buddhist meditation. (Crispell interview 2016)

Karl Berger also believed that the relaxed atmosphere was crucial to the collaborations of guiding artists across scenes.

Let’s say Lee Konitz would meet Leroy Jenkins, or David Izenson (sic) would play with Harvey Sollberger—stuff that would never happen in New York, because the scenes were much more separate. People were more relaxed up there. They didn’t think in terms of the PR quality or the career
situation or whatever it was. (Panken 2011)
Pheeroan akLaff also cites the idyllic surroundings of CMS as an important factor for the way that musicians would interact with one another. However, he also stresses that different people reacted in radically different ways to the freedom that CMS offered, remarking that:

> It was a peaceful environment and a non-judgmental environment, and that's big. Some people can thrive in those situations and some people end up wafting. For some people kind of float into this...it’s like, ‘I don’t know who I am, I don’t know why I’m doing this.’ And other people find purpose. So it really ends up being an individual [experience]. You learn more about the possibilities and yourself. (akLaff interview 2016b)

akLaff also adds the caveat that musicians who came up from New York still had to go back to the city and translate their positive experiences into meaningful action. In many cases, this was harder than achieving this self-realization in the first place, as akLaff relates, “you can have those discussions, but then you have to go back to New York and figure out how to make that work for you, so that’s the hard part!” (ibid.)

Peter Apfelbaum, who moved to New York the year after attending CMS, would continue to make trips up to Woodstock to spend quality time and perform with musicians associated with CMS. He remembers the visits fondly, describing the Berger family taking him into their home.

> I would either stay at Creative Music Studio itself, if there was a free room. Sometimes they’d actually give me a room, or I’d stay with Karl and Ingrid, 20 minutes away at their place. And they had two daughters who were, like, 12 and 14 at the time, and I was 18 and so I was like friendly with them and their friends and other people that were kind of younger. I
was still kind of a kid, but I was still like the youngest person there.
(Apfelbaum interview 2016a)

**Silence and Listening**

Karl Berger remembers that one of the most important factors influencing his decision to move to Woodstock was the acoustic environment. Berger believes that the overall silence was an essential element that allowed him to develop new ways of approaching music. As Berger relates:

> If you want to study music from scratch, you need to start with silence. You need to learn not to play and not to hear anything but to really work with sounds. And it's very hard to do something like that in New York, people are very distracted there. (Berger interview 2014)

At CMS, the idea of using silence, and listening seem to be ever-present concerns. Although Cage, Berger, Don Cherry, and Wadada Leo Smith all valued silence in their music, their ideas around its significance differed. At the risk of oversimplification, one of Cage's primary ideas about listening was that it let the listener re-contextualize their relationship to sound. During his experience in an anechoic chamber at Harvard in 1951, Cage realized that there was "no such thing as silence, but rather that there were only sounds: what he had referred to as silence was simply the sounds he had not intended" (Pritchett 1999:75). After this experience Cage was more interested in the duality of intention and non-intention. Cage’s 1991 quote about sounds and listening is instructive.

> When I hear what we call music, it seems to me that someone is talking. And talking about his feelings or about his ideas, of relationships. But when I hear traffic, the sound of traffic here on sixth avenue for instance, I don’t have the feeling that anyone is talking, I have the feeling that a
sound is acting, and I love the activity of sound. What it does, is it gets louder and quieter, and it gets higher and lower. And it gets longer and shorter. I’m completely satisfied with that, I don’t need sound to talk to me...when I talk about music, it finally comes to people’s minds that I’m talking about sound that doesn’t mean anything. That is not inner, but is just outer. And they say, these people who finally understand that say, you mean it’s just sounds? To mean that for something to just be a sound is to be useless. Whereas I love sounds, just as they are, and I have no need for them to be anything more. I don’t want sound to be psychological. I don’t want a sound to pretend that it’s a bucket, or that it’s a president, or that it’s in love with another sound. I just want it to be a sound. And I’m not so stupid either. (1991)

Cage’s ideas of non-intentionality privileged listening to non-traditional (from a musical standpoint) sounds and forging a new relationship to them over developing a personal musical vocabulary. However, other guiding artists developed different philosophical approaches to using silence to facilitate listening. Leo Smith’s music, in particular, focused on the relationship between sound and silence. Peter Apfelbaum, recalls the influence of Smith’s concept of “rhythm units”:

It was written down using a certain mixture of conventional notation and unconventional notation. And he was really into what he called ‘rhythm units’ and I took that to mean that they were units of sound, that would be interspersed with silence. And one of the most memorable things that he said during that time was that ...when you play a phrase that you should start out leaving the same amount of space that you took to play the notes, to leave that amount of silence, to really hear what you just played. But that got me to think about silence in a whole other way. How you’re not just stopping you’re actually really using silence, this kind of yin and yang
Smith’s idea of “silence” acts as a clarifying device for one’s own improvisational practice. The idea of using silence to find one’s own sound has resonance both with the Creative Music Studio’s focus on self-realization and George Lewis’ assertion that “one important aspect of Afrological improvisation is ‘telling your own story’” (1996: 241).

In his essay “Improvised music after 1950,” George Lewis, a 1978 CMS guiding artist, defines two different strains of American experimentalism. The “Eurological” is grounded in a Euro-American tradition typified by John Cage; the “Afrological” is grounded in an African American approach in the lineage of Charlie Parker (2004:133). Lewis writes that these terms are not ethnically essential, but rather that: “‘Afrological’ and ‘Eurological’ systems of improvisative musicality refers to social and cultural location and is theorized here as historically emergent rather than ethnically essential” (ibid.).

Lewis also argues that in the Afrological tradition, freedom is “perceived as being possible only through discipline, defined as technical knowledge of music theory and of one’s instrument as well as thorough attention to the background, history, and culture of one’s music” (1996: 238). Accordingly, the goal of Smith’s approach to silence is for improvisers working within his system to develop the discipline to pay greater attention to the details of their improvisations, and to take the necessary time to reflect in order to further develop their original voice.

In a related, but decidedly different, vein were Don Cherry’s ideas of silence and listening, ideas that drew on his study of different world traditions.
and immersion in Ornette Coleman’s philosophy of harmolodics. Berger recalls that:

Don Cherry was the first one to lead me to the fact that every note and every tone is new, so you need to really listen very closely because there is no precedent to what you do. You always have to, sort of, harmonize again, and again, and again, every moment. (Berger interview 2014)

Berger also used Cage’s music to educate CMS students about his own ideas about sound and silence, in relation to performing Cage’s iconic piece, 4’33.” Berger relates:

I had the original score. I turned the page, I did the whole thing. I used that performance to tell the audience afterwards about the practice of ‘listening to the sounds disappearing,’ more of an active way to go to silence. I would play a note on the vibraphone and let the people listen to it disappearing. Which was more like what we did at CMS, that type of work. (Berger in Curran “Oral History Project-Alvin Curran”)

Berger remarks that one key purpose of creating CMS was to help him better understand the music that he was making in the 1960s. Like the aspect of Smith’s silences that were meant for musicians to “really hear” what they just played, Berger’s mission was to better understand the music he was playing through teaching it.

But then at the same time, I like to know what it is that we’re doing. So the Creative Music Studio was a lot about that. One part of it was, we played all this music in the ‘60s, and then I was sitting back and said, ‘So what is it that we’re doing?’ Now, the only way to find out what you’re doing is if you teach it to somebody else. If you have to explain what you’re doing to somebody else, then it will come out—or it won’t, of course. So that was a big part of it, that I wanted to really do some practical research in formal workshops. (in Panken 2008)
Marilyn Crispell

Marilyn Crispell (b. 1947) decided to move to Woodstock after a brief period spent there in 1977. A student at New England Conservatory and a musician active in Boston for a few years, she decided to attend CMS at the suggestion of saxophonist/composer Charlie Mariano, who told her that “There [were people] there that play the kind of music that you play” there (Crispell interview 2016).

I actually came up (to Woodstock) to check it out in the summer of ’77 and I liked what I saw and I decided to go back to Boston and pack up my things and move to Woodstock. I was part of the scene there and I took some workshops and I also taught some classes and ear training. In a way, I didn’t really consider myself a student there. I had already graduated from New England Conservatory in composition and piano and stuff like that, but I had no experience with improvising with a group and things like that and meeting all these guiding artists and being able to play their music. I had studied traditional jazz for two years before with Charlie Banacos in Boston, (Crispell interview 2016)

CMS was an important meeting place for both the Afrological and Eurological strains of the American experimental tradition that Lewis (1996) describes. Crispell recalls that it was at CMS that she was first exposed to the music of John Cage, by Cage directly. In fact, she was not aware of his music at all before her CMS encounter.

I became aware of that after I left. John Cage was actually at CMS, and he had some piece that involved six pianists playing on 2 or 3 pianos. Maybe 3 pianos, I don’t remember, but he had a score, part of it was graphic, and he was there. (Crispell interview 2016)
The historical perspective that Crispell provides is a telling example of the position of John Cage within the American university/conservatory in the early 1970s.26 Now ubiquitous in academia, it may be hard to imagine how a student at NEC or any other prestigious conservatory working in contemporary composition would be unfamiliar with Cage’s work. At the time Marilyn Crispell had studied contemporary composition with Robert Cogan and Pozzi Escot and was “involved in studying contemporary music and composing contemporary music, [performing] some Alban Berg and some Schoenberg and stuff like that” (Crispell interview 2016).

One of Crispell’s most consequential experiences at CMS, however, was meeting and performing with Anthony Braxton. She recalls that Braxton initially heard her in performance with guiding artist composer/improviser George Russell (1923-2009). The two bonded immediately:

It was when George Russell was there, and I was playing in a workshop of George Russell’s and apparently Anthony heard me playing and at the end of each week the guiding artist would do a concert, and he asked me to play with him on his concert. So we played duo and that’s on the second volume of the CMS stuff that’s just been put out. That duet was found, I’ve heard it and it sounds amazing. We clicked from the first note. And after the concert he said, ‘This is my new pianist.’ (ibid.) Fortunately, this chance encounter was captured on tape and Crispell, having the privilege of listening to a re-mastered version recently, was taken aback at how good their initial meeting sounded 40 years later. She also remembers that both

26 It also illustrates the East/West Coast split in academic composition programs “between the postserialists and the experimentalists....with Babbitt and followers based in the East, Cage and followers in the West” (Born 1995:62).
she and Braxton, during their time in Woodstock and subsequent work in Braxton’s quartet, began to develop unique compositional and improvisational ideas. Both composer/improvisers were interested in developing the idea of musical collage, where each musician would play an independent composition simultaneously. Crispell recalls:

We simultaneously had ideas of, what people called the ‘collage concept,’ because I liked Charles Ives. Charles Ives did that...so I was already familiar with that concept, but it was wonderful to be able to actually play that concept with Anthony. He was totally into that, if you played too much with him he would complain. He wanted independent voices, and would sometimes ask you to play a written solo piece underneath an improvised solo of his. Stuff like that. So, it was sort of like a validation for my liking of that concept. I studied the way he composed and we both also sometimes had this concept of writing cells, writing cells that can be used for improvisation. Notated cells. (ibid.)

Crispell, who would go on to perform with Anthony Braxton, and with Anthony Davis in his opera X, has developed a unique approach to improvisation influenced by her work with Anthony Braxton and has had a prodigious solo career, recording for ECM and a slew of independent European labels. Unlike many CMS participants she also continues to live in Woodstock, and was a CMS guiding artist during the schools 21st century reformation in 2013.

**Peter Apfelbaum**

Peter Apfelbaum’s aesthetic reflects the eclectic nature of CMS, and incorporates the wide variety of influences that he was exposed to during his formative years in Berkeley, CA and during his time at CMS. Unlike many artists
that Sweet associates with the school, Apfelbaum spent a significant amount of time in Woodstock with Berger and CMS afforded him some important early performance opportunities. His time at the school also gave him first-hand exposure to many of the artists whose music he had become fascinated with through recordings.

Like Marilyn Crispell, Peter Apfelbaum (b. 1960) would attend CMS for the first time during the summer of 1977. Apfelbaum, who was 16 when he first attended the school, recalls finding out about the workshop from an ad in *Down Beat* magazine. That year Apfelbaum was accompanied by his childhood friend, composer/trumpet player Steven Bernstein. Apfelbaum recalls that the group of guiding artists “was pretty varied...Abdullah Ibrahim was there, Carla Bley, Jimmy Giuffre, Sunny Murray, Leo Smith” (Peter Apfelbaum interview 2016a). Occurring during a formative phase in his development, Apfelbaum was deeply influenced by the time that he spent around CMS. One aspect that Apfelbaum found particularly important was the way that the guiding artists conducted their workshops.

I think that the most important thing for me and the real significant thing for me was just, the fact that in most of the cases that we were playing with these people...we were actually playing their music as if we were a member of their band. And that was fascinating to me. It was fascinating on a lot of levels. (Apfelbaum interview 2016a)

Apfelbaum, who was already an avid listener of jazz and creative music, like Marilyn Crispell, was introduced to recent developments in Euro-American experimental music as a CMS student.

There were people that I wasn’t familiar with before who were starting to
do really interesting things more in the contemporary classical and new music area, like Ursula Oppens, the pianist and Fredric Rzewski, the composer and keyboard player. (ibid.)

In addition to the influence of Leo Smith on Apfelbaum through his rhythm unit system, Apfelbaum was also struck by the way that Smith carried himself and approached the music. In particular, Apfelbaum was inspired by the radically individualistic approach that Smith brought to the jazz tradition.

[H]e just came with his trumpet, and some people said, ‘What should we play?’ and somebody said ‘Well, what tunes do you want to play? What tunes do you know?’ and Leo Smith said, ‘I don’t know any tunes.’ He kind of said it in a way, where he might have known some tunes but he had made sure to forget them. That was interesting to me because I had come up learning some tunes when I was 12, 13, 14. I mean I’m still learning tunes, but part of what I did, and my interest was away from that. Luckily, I had that as part of my improvisational base, the you could say ‘jazz history’ base and checking out all the cats and stuff. But the music that was really speaking to me and that I wanted to experiment with was not that. I wasn’t interested in playing tunes on stage for my own gigs. So it was kind of liberating to hear him say that. And he decided to play a slow blues, and he played the most amazing shit. And it was, he obviously knew, I mean it was just a blues, but it wasn’t like somebody that was untrained. He was relating to all of the chords and the form just like any master of the blues form, but doing it in his own way. (ibid.)

Apfelbaum also attended CMS the next year, studying with the musicians of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, a group that had made a huge impression on him some years earlier as a 14 year old in the Bay Area.

Given their own predisposition towards the incorporation of theatrical influences, a great deal of what the members of the Art Ensemble taught revolved
around theatrical and multi-media performance. Apfelbaum recalls that one of the biggest lessons that he learned was the importance of cultivating the ability to remember and duplicate performances, even if they were partially improvised.

He recalls:

Joseph Jarman had a piece where we also had to do a theatre piece. So we had to combine some theatrical thing, like a skit, and a lot of us ended up making these skits where we would involve something else that was there, and we had written some kind of dialogue with music and costumes, and the interesting thing was...Now this really did stick with me a lot, I haven’t thought about it in a while. We would do these things and he wouldn’t tell us he was going to do this, but when we each would perform our little thing for him, I think it had a limit of having to be a minute long or something like that. He’d say, ‘Ok, cool. Well, now repeat what you just did, exactly.’ And a lot of us were caught by surprise because even though we had created these little skits, a lot of it was improvised. Whether it was the dialogue or improvisational music, and then it was a challenge to repeat that exactly. (ibid.)

Jarman’s exercise clued Apfelbaum in to the importance of cultivating the discipline of focusing on his improvisations closely enough to be able to repeat them accurately. It also caused Apfelbaum to think differently about the nature of improvisation and the relationship between composed and improvised passages in creative music.

the second part of that that I think is really profound is something that I got from listening to Cecil Taylor when I would go see him more than one night, or multiple nights. You hear him one night and everything sounds very improvisational but then if you hear him the second night he may

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27 Sweet, who attended CMS, includes his own account of this workshop in Music Universe, Music Mind (1996:79-80).
play the same song and then you start to realize what of it was actually composed. He'll do it in a very different way but you think, ‘Wait a minute, that’s like a sequence that follows this other sequence, that’s something he did last night. That’s actually like a song. That’s like his composition!’ And so that was a really deep statement that Joseph made, because it made me look at everything like...number one to be aware of what you’re doing and number two, that when you hear an improvisational performance, if you hear it twice you can really hear what of it was pre-conceived or planned, and then you can recognize it. (ibid.)

Apfelbaum also recounts the impact that studying with Roscoe Mitchell had on him, and relates he was particularly struck by the breadth of Mitchell’s musical concept.

I think with Roscoe I really learned a lot from playing some music of his with him, but also just from listening to him. He kind of epitomized something that was a very Creative Music Studio type of attitude, which was to be non-stylistic. And that’s something that later on when I played with Don Cherry, that was one of the big things that I got from playing with Don, and Ornette was really that way too. And I mean everyone ends up sounding like themselves but Don’s whole thing, and Roscoe in his own way were very non-stylized. In Roscoe’s case we would play a song was only three notes and that would go on for 20 minutes, like this song of his called ‘Chant.’ It was only 3 notes, over and over and over, the same thing. And then you have to think about what you can do for variety. Like, there’s timbre, there’s dynamics, there’s tone, all these things. So, it really got you thinking in a different way, and then he has improvisations where it’s just nothing but sound for a half hour, and he’s circular breathing. (ibid.)

Jarman’s idea of being non-stylistic shouldn’t be confused with Derek Bailey’s idea of “non-idiomatic” improvisation. CMS guiding artist Adam Rudolph often relates Don Cherry’s quote that, “style is the death of creativity” (Rudolph
The general AACM idea of being non-stylistic does not mean abandoning genre or the defining elements of musical traditions, but rather not being confined to playing within only one style or tradition. In a similar vein, Anthony Braxton’s related idea of “trans-idiomaticism” deals with working through multiple idioms rather than dismissing generic markers outright. The incorporation of a diverse set of influences would continue to define the compositions of many students and guiding artists of CMS as well as the musicians of the New Haven cohort.

As a young man, growing up in Berkeley, Apfelbaum was exposed to the music of many CMS guiding artists. This exposure was in the form of live performances at the Keystone corner, as well as recordings and magazines available at Berigan’s, a local independently owned record store. Apfelbaum recalls:

Berigan’s records was really, really helpful to us, and [Berigan, the owner] was a great guy. You know, we’d go in there and a lot of the time we wouldn’t buy anything at all, and he would take pleasure in playing us all kinds of records...he was into Dexter and Phil Woods and those guys but the great thing about him was he had all the AACM stuff, it just wasn’t quite his thing...sometimes when we would go to see the Art Ensemble of Chicago or Braxton, he would drive us. He would be the cool adult that our parents would trust us with. He would drive us to Keystone Korner and he’d like go out and meet some adult friends and he’d smoke a joint in the back of the club or something like that. We were naïve, we were just there for the music, but somehow our parents trusted him and he was cool. So he would take us to see like Oliver Lake and Sam Rivers, and Cecil [Taylor]. And then Dexter [Gordon] too, because his thing was a bit more straight ahead. (ibid.)
Apfelbaum recalls being able to purchase records from many of the independent labels, including some of Leo Smith’s early Kabell sides. In addition to the wide variety of records available at Berigan’s, it also carried copies of *Coda*, and a local Bay area magazine that focused on creative music, *Bells*.

Like Gerry Hemingway, Apfelbaum believes that one of the reasons that he and his friends were drawn towards the music of the Art Ensemble and other experimentalists involved with CMS was because of the countercultural ethos of the era, and their hometown, Berkeley in particular:

I think it’s partly because, Steven, and I, and Peck (Allmond), and Jessie (Jones), we’re all from Berkeley, California. So that in itself made it so that we grew up kind of questioning everything. And it was also that time of course, the ‘60s and ‘70s. We were questioning authority, questioning conventions. (ibid.)

After these first workshop experiences, he moved to New York at the age of 18. On the recommendation of Abdullah Ibrahim, Apfelbaum was able to secure a room at the Chelsea Hotel. In his free time, he would often head up to Woodstock to perform or spend more time studying and collaborating with his friends and guiding artists.

I moved into the Chelsea Hotel because Abdullah Ibrahim was living there and I went to go hang out with him because I had met him at CMS and rehearsed with him a little bit, doing some music he was developing. He was living there and he put in a word for me and I ended up getting this room there and I lived there for almost a year. Yeah, which was a wild time, Sid Vicious lived down the hall. And Elvin [Jones] was living there, kind of part time. So then I would go up to Creative Music Studio a lot and kind of hang out and do gigs with Karl. (ibid.)

Apfelbaum would go on to play with Don Cherry from 1988 until his death.
in 1995, in Cherry’s group Multi-Kulti. Like the artists of the New Haven cohort, he created an original approach to composition influenced by his intercultural collaborations and exposure to the concepts of AACM artists. Like Crispell, Apfelbaum would return to teach at CMS as a guiding artist himself in 2013.

**Addressing Harmolodics**

As mentioned earlier, informal talks about Ornette Coleman’s philosophy of “harmolodics” were the initial impetus for the creation of CMS. Because of the role that Coleman’s philosophy played in the initial organization of the school and the outsized influence that his approach to music has had on jazz and creative music since his appearance on the scene in New York in 1959, it is important to address his legacy here.

Wadada Leo Smith hails harmolodics as one of the first kinds of “systemic music,” after George Russell’s Lydian Chromatic Concept. Indeed, Smith considers Russell “the father of systemic music... in America” (Smith interview 2015). Unlike Russell’s system which was highly systematized and influenced by his study of Western classical harmony, Coleman’s concept is much more abstract, and in many ways, nebulous. Although it is referred to by many composer/improvisers as a system, it is a system whose actual components remain largely open to interpretation.

Stephen Rush’s excellent book *Free Jazz, Harmolodics, and Ornette Coleman* (2017), which includes musical analysis using a harmolodic framework and reflections on interviews with Coleman on a variety of subjects, attempts a few definitions of the system. Rush writes: “Harmolodics is about the relationship
between style and process in improvisation. It is also about human rights and issues surrounding equality. Simply put, harmolodics respects every single voice in an ensemble, without creating a preference or elevated function for any one instrument” (2017:3). While the term “harmolodics” itself was entered into public usage by Coleman in the 1970s, most famously in the liner notes to Dancing in Your Head (1976), Karl Berger relates that, “the harmolodic concept was fundamentally in place from the start of Ornette’s Atlantic recordings“ in the late 1950s (Beger in VanTrikt 2007:18)

Don Cherry, a long-time collaborator of Coleman’s cites perhaps the clearest practical definition of at least one aspect of harmolodics,

[Coleman] has a system which is called the ‘harmolodic’ system, before then we were always improvising from chords. You’d play the melody and then you would improvise from the chords of the melody, standards or chords of the different compositions that would come up at that time...Playing with Ornette Coleman was where we would play a melody which was like a similar swing like a bebop [composition] but going into other swings, other rhythms. Then you would improvise to create chords, to make the music transcend. The object was always to bring the brilliance of the music, which was the happiness and the spirit. So as you improvise, you would improvise to create forms and to create harmonies and to create rhythms in your improvisation. (emphasis mine) (in Lasson 1978)

Don Cherry’s understanding of harmolodics as a system that allowed the improviser to create form, drawing on aspects of the composition and group interplay is perhaps the most cogent explanation of how Coleman’s music works in practice. Charlie Haden, another long time collaborator has a similar explanation: “technically speaking, it was a constant modulation in the
improvising that was taken from the direction of the composition, and from the direction inside the musician, and from listening to each other” (Litweiler 1992:131). As Eric Churry points out, many of Coleman’s solo forms on earlier recordings only deviated slightly from the form of the compositions, with greater experimentation occurring after his album *Free Jazz* recorded in December 1960 (Charry 2000:270).

Harmolodics was never codified or clearly defined by Coleman to the extent that George Russell and other composers defined their musical systems, and would become synonymous with the totality of Ornette Coleman’s various musical philosophies and concepts. Accordingly, as a system it has been criticized by many musicians, including those who played with Coleman. Kenny Wessel (b.1956), a guitarist and long time collaborator of Coleman’s in his Prime Time group states:

I’ve even heard some great musicians, I won’t mention their names, people who worked with Ornette even say (this is a quote), ‘if you hear...a musician talking about harmolodics like he knows what he’s talking about you’ve got to be wary of him.’ (Wessel interview 2013)

Wessel argues, however, that the poetics of Coleman’s system and thought in general were equally important to the actual mechanics. He relates that he learned the most about Coleman’s harmolodic concepts through long rehearsals and contemplation of Coleman’s “koans.”

Often what you will find is some Zen *koan* type of things that he said, or almost non-rational types of information dissemination because Ornette has a very nonlinear way of thinking. But I think that is part of his genius. If there’s a point from A to B, he won’t just take a straight line; he will find
many ways to get there. As Karl was talking in the rhythm workshop earlier this morning, the rational mind can be in the way of creativity at times. I found that Ornette was almost non-reactional and very non-linear in a very creative sort of way. (Wessel interview 2013)

While the term harmolodics can be applied to many of Coleman’s concepts, one of the important elements of the system is that, as Rush mentions, it does away with any perceived hierarchy of musical elements. Coleman explains the overarching conceptual basis for harmolodics in a 1983 piece in the “Pro Session” section of Down Beat magazine, writing “harmony, melody, speed, rhythm, time and phrases all have equal position in the results that come from the placing and spacing of ideas” (Coleman 1983:54). Ostensibly, it was this egalitarian aspect of Coleman’s practice that would become a vital element in structuring CMS. 28 Wessel, who was a guiding artist during the 2013 season of the newly reconstituted CMS, describes that, often, in Coleman’s music one of the objectives was to have many independent elements occurring at the same time.

One of the things that he talked about was this independence thing: we’d might be playing a ballad and he’d want me to play very—a beautiful ballad, some of the most beautiful melodies I’d ever heard—and he want me to play something very dissonant or ugly against everything, and somebody would play a funky thing against this beautiful ballad. At one point early on, I said, ‘Ornette, that doesn’t really fit. It’s such a beautiful melody can I just..’ He would say, ‘You know, we all live in the city. And you might walk down the street in the city you might see an argument and then a baby crying and two people holding hands, and a car crash, all out

28 If the universalist and utopian implications of harmolodics weren’t already clear enough, Coleman goes on to write in the same piece that, “Pop, classical, rock, folk, and jazz are names that are used to cover up a lot of human racialism” (Coleman 1983:55).
of the corner of your eye at the same time, why can’t music be like that? Music is like that. It doesn’t have to be a ballad, let’s just play one emotion.’ Like a beautiful ballad, let’s be emotional and heartfelt. Or an up-tempo tune, let be frenetic, energetic or joyful, whatever. He would always say, ‘I want different emotions, different feelings happening at the same time.’ (Wessel interview 2013)

While the city metaphor may be at odds with Berger and others embrace of silence and the idea of Woodstock as an idyllic natural setting in opposition to the soundscape of the city, Ornette’s metaphor is fitting for the overall structure of CMS and its ability to tolerate musical difference. Sometimes guiding artists’ approaches would fit together beautifully leading to new collaborations, and sometimes they would clash ideologically with the students and other guiding artists. Berger and Frederic Rzewski detail John Cage’s frustration with his CMS teaching experience.

He did several workshops at CMS, from the very beginning. We performed some of his pieces; he was there. He hated everything. (Berger in Curran, n.d.) Though for some of the guiding artists, the results may have been disappointing, even during these moments of conflict the experience of performing and learning new concepts was often revelatory for the musicians studying there. Although Cage may have hated the way that his pieces were performed, the experience of performing them was transformative for Marilyn Crispell, who despite receiving a degree from New England Conservatory specializing in contemporary composition and performance, had never played a graphic score before (Crispell interview 2016).

Only within such a system, or meta-system, could a school encompassing
such a diverse set of ideas exist. Karl Berger states his criteria for guiding artists, describing the range of iconoclastic expression that he was looking for:

We just didn’t want to stay in one particular stylistic environment. So we were looking for people who were strong in having developed their own individual language. And teach people how they got there and what they did and what they were interested in. So essentially, I didn’t want to create a school, I wanted people to sort of be just creatively involved with people who had done it and were in the middle of their professional life. And they would even contradict each other but that didn’t matter, it was fine (emphasis mine). (Berger interview 2014)

Adam Rudolph, who spent a few months in 1980 as a guiding instructor along with his Mandingo Griot Society bandmates, emphasizes the importance of the completely open approach to teaching that was encouraged at CMS.

Nobody at CMS ever told us what to teach. Also, the form how everyone would teach, was totally left to the artists. That sets an example for developing your own voice. (Rudolph, n.d.)

Clearly, the harmolodic philosophy of doing away with musical hierarchies was an important model for the collaborative kind of education that took place at CMS. George Lewis writes about the non-hierarchical nature of CMS, and the influence that it had on his pedagogical approach, stating: “Eventually, opportunities arose to present my developing ideas about music to students of my own, while remaining very much a student myself” (Lewis 2000:92). Lewis’ own workshops also reflected the kind of diversity that the school had encouraged since its inception. “The overall planning of the summer workshop reflected the high priority which, then as now, I placed upon the presentation of diversity—not only with regard to musical discourses, materials, and forms, but in terms of
The Influence of Don Cherry

In addition to Coleman, Don Cherry was one of the most important influences on the organization and overall aesthetic direction of CMS. As one of Coleman’s closest collaborators, spending years in his ensemble developing an original concept, Cherry internalized Coleman’s musical philosophy on a particularly deep level. The experience of playing with Coleman was a formative one in Don Cherry’s development and in a 1978 documentary Cherry refers to Coleman as “my guru, my teacher” (Lasson 1978). Cherry would also travel the world, collaborating with musicians from many cultures, and use the influence of Coleman’s ecumenical spirit to bridge different musical traditions. Howard Mandel writes:

Ornette Coleman is a unique and idiosyncratic genius of free music, but Don Cherry was Coleman’s equal, brilliantly shadowing, responding, counterposing and quipping with Coleman each step of a creative and enduring, if as yet incompletely articulated, way. Cherry subscribed to Ornette’s theory of harmolodics, and was indeed its chief proponent, since not even Ornette enjoyed more diverse, fruitful collaborations than Cherry. (Mandel 1998)

Don Cherry was born in 1936 in Oklahoma City, moving to Los Angeles when he was only 4 years old. Growing up in the Watts neighborhood of South Los Angeles, he was profoundly affected by the work of Simon Rodia, an Italian immigrant who created monumental structures on his property in Cherry’s neighborhood using discarded materials found throughout the city. Cherry cites
the influence of Simon Rodia’s Watts Towers on his own musical quest.

When I was young, I lived next to, in Watts, where a man made this tower. It was an Italian man, in the middle of a black neighborhood making a tower. And he made it out of seashells and ceramic pieces and different pieces. And he couldn’t ask anyone to help him because he didn’t know why he was doing it, he had to do it. And that’s the same energy that has been carrying us on. Like me and Moki, before we were here, working with movement and trying to move from city to city and trying to make the happenings and things. We didn’t know why we were doing it but we had to do it. (Lasson 1978)

Cherry’s early experiences in Watts left a lasting impression upon him. Perhaps because of his formative experiences with Rodia’s artistry, he delighted in seeing things that were made by hand. Cherry would often bring back instruments from his travels in West Africa, and liked people to admire the craftsmanship. Cherry remarks, in relation to the West African hunters harp that he would play in the street: “its good for people to see an instrument that’s been made by hand. Always the first reaction is, ‘Oh, this is something primitive.’ But then when the black people in the street see it they can relate to it, they start singing, they start dancing” (in Lasson 1978).

Cherry also loved to be surrounded by nature, partly because of what he perceived as a lack of natural beauty in the environs of his childhood in Watts. Cherry explains:

Myself, I grew up in the ghetto. In Los Angeles, in Watts and I never knew about seasons. And in the ghetto you don’t feel...there’s not that much nature. I mean Los Angeles is just flat, it’s dry, and it’s very smoggy. ‘Cuz I remember when I was young where I lived was like 113th street and we could see the mountains the first three years I was there. I first came there
in 1940 from Oklahoma, because when the land was destroyed there with oil, the land was destroyed from crops a lot of people moved to California. It’s like the Grapes of Wrath, around that time, in the 40s. The first three years we got there you could see the mountains, but after that around 45 on, you couldn’t see it. There was so much pollution you couldn’t see the mountains anymore and you more or less couldn’t really feel the seasons because in the ghetto it’s not that much of a feeling of nature. And this is something that I always had the dream of experiencing when I was young. And I always had this dream of being in nature and I wanted my children to experience that. (Lasson 1978)

Because of this, Woodstock was a perfect setting for Cherry to visit when he wasn’t living in his farmhouse in Sweden or travelling the world. The scene at Cherry’s place in Sweden, as well as his welcoming nature, was reminiscent of the atmosphere at CMS. Hamid Drake recalls:

He and his family had a huge house that at one time had been a school. He said many musicians would pass through, and it would be great to have us spend some time there and use it like a workshop in the formation of a group that would go on tour. So we did! [Laughs.] We spent about five months with him. A lot of musicians were coming through at that time, including a young musician from India named Trilok Gurtu, which is where I met him (Drake 2015)

In addition to the mystical quality of Rodia’s inexplicable drive to create, Cherry appears to have been influenced by his ability to use disparate, cast-off elements to create a cohesive artwork. Don Cherry was but one of the musicians growing up in Watts to acknowledge the impact of Rodia’s work. The Towers have featured on the album covers of numerous Los Angeles jazz and creative musicians, and have a special spiritual resonance for many Angelenos. Fellow South LA-bred cornetist and conceptualist Lawrence “Butch” Morris (1947-2013)
once described the nature of his conductions as “crafting assemblages from sonic materials that might be a bit random or loose” (Stanley 2009:7), tying his music into the aesthetic of Rodia and the subsequent assemblage movement that would blossom around the towers in the aftermath of the 1965 Watts Rebellion. Indeed, Cherry was far from the only musician to be inspired by Rodia’s towers, as Steven Isoardi notes:

Perhaps the most important, especially for improvising artists, was the object lesson of Rodia’s restless experimentalism. According to [Charles] Mingus, ‘He was always changing his ideas while he worked and tearing down what he wasn’t satisfied with and starting over again, so pinnacles as tall as a two-story building would rise up and disappear and rise again. What was there yesterday mightn’t be there next time you looked, but then another lacy-looking tower would spring up in its place.’ (2006: 67)

As a world traveler Don Cherry strived to impart his musical experiences to others through his original, unconventional pedagogy. Cherry was particularly interested in sharing his musical experiences with the community, Watts, that he grew up in, as well as with people in neighborhoods across the country and throughout the world. Asked by an interviewer why he was travelling to Harlem, Cherry responded:

Well, I go there because I have a lot of friends there and I hope that I can bring some kind of light or knowledge from my travels and I share that with the different people that I’m involved with and the people that I meet. I take the Donso Ngoni [to] play in the street and ...the black people now in America are really interested in getting their roots and understanding their roots. What’s so incredible about that is that it’s the children who started that. (in Lasson 1978)

As Adam Rudolph recalls, “Don Cherry would always say that ‘jazz is the
glue,” meaning that a common understanding of improvisation, and familiarity with jazz, worked as an orientation point and structuring device within his collaborations. Cherry’s physical metaphor for his approach to intercultural music-making seems to suggest that he saw his collaborations as a type of collage that needed a common understanding to cohere.

Don Cherry would also become a major influence on Karl Berger, who met Cherry in 1965. Berger recalls:

Then the opportunity arose in ‘65, in March... We used to play in Paris a lot at the Chat Qui Peche with people like Chet Baker and Steve Lacy and other people, and in March 1965 Don Cherry came to Paris, and I met him at the Buttercup Club, which Bud Powell’s wife ran. I saw him sitting there, and I just walked up to him and said, ‘I want to play with you.’ Don was a very intuitive cat. He looked at me and said, ‘Come to the rehearsal tomorrow at 4.’ Then the same night, after the rehearsal, I played with the band, and from there on, the next three years, I played with that band. So this is how simple it was. (Berger interview 2014)

While Cherry was not present during all of the CMS sessions, his influence loomed large. He had introduced Berger to Coleman, and Cherry was a foundational influence on Berger’s music. Berger, who was studying in Frankfurt with philosopher Theodor Adorno, was so taken with Cherry’s music that upon performing with him for the first time, he decided to abandon his foray into academia. Speaking of his work with Adorno, Berger recalls:

I basically started a project under Adorno’s guidance, because I still wasn’t sure whether I wanted to just do music or wanted to also be dealing with philosophy, particularly with this field. But that soon faded, as soon as I met Don Cherry, because then there was strictly no more time. (Berger in Panken 2008)
Along with Yusef Lateef, Cherry was also one of the first American creative musicians to incorporate traditional musics from Africa and Asia into his own music, and introduced Karl Berger to the basic ideas that would comprise Berger’s system of *gamala taki*. Will Hermes chronicles the genesis of the concept:

One day, Cherry came to practice with a new tune. ‘It’s called Gamala Gamala Taki,’ he announced. ‘You just count like three-three-two. But don’t use the numbers: use the syllables.’...The song fell by the wayside, but for Berger, the exercise of playing it blossomed into a universalizing notion that all music could be divided into units of three (gamala) and two (taki). (Hermes 2011:174)

Like Berger, Cherry was immersed in Buddhist philosophy. Cherry’s music had a deeply spiritual quality, often drawing from chants and devotional music. He also sought to create a multi-sensory experience in the 1970s with the presentations of his Organic Music Theatre, which he describes as “happenings” (see above).

Cherry relates how he drew on Tibetan Buddhist chants in his compositions:

And then I remember Kalu Rinpoche and him giving me the first mantra – om mani padme hum, and it was very powerful, and I felt that I should share that with other musicians (and) that it’d be just as powerful to them, and it’s a seed, you know – and so, working with you, and I asked Kalu Rinpoche. I said, ‘I’m working with children, what would be the best way of working with children at the beginning’, and he said, ‘om mani padme hum’, and teach it to them and let them realize that it brings a happy feeling. So that’s the way that I ended up trying to...incorporate it into the music. (Cherry interviewed by Orlovsky 1976)

Unlike Berger who, as mentioned earlier, admits that he had never
formally studied any world traditions, Don Cherry had travelled around the world and studied many different musics both informally and formally. Among the traditions that he studied were *dhrupad* vocal music in Bombay with one of the Dagar brothers (Lavezzoli 2007:27, Gupta 1987:159), and *tabla* with Pandit Taranath Rao (Rudolph interview 2014). It was most likely Cherry’s influence that brought many of the musicians from different world traditions to CMS. Cherry talks about his dedication to learning the mechanics of different traditions, and the seriousness with which he approached them.

A lot of musicians just want to play exotic music. They hear the sound, but they don’t want to really learn the rudiments of it all, the foundations of certain musics. Indian music for instance. You have to go there, really. (in Mandel 1998)

Another important aspect of Cherry’s musicianship that enabled him to create music that drew from an encyclopedic knowledge of different world traditions was his incredible memory. In addition to his study of traditions with master musicians in Europe, India and Africa, Cherry was a voracious listener of short wave radio. Karl Berger recalls:

He always had earphones on, all day long. And he listened to stations from Egypt, and like all world music stations, all over, Asia...and search short wave stuff, you know? Like Ornette called him ‘the man with the elephant memory.’ Don Cherry needed to hear a tune ONCE and he would, like, memorize it. And he expected us to do the same. So he would come pretty much every day with a new tune. New pieces. Some of those pieces he didn’t remember where they were from. (Berger interview 2014)

Adam Rudolph, who performed with Cherry in the 1970s and considers him one of his mentors, speaks to the way that Cherry was able to bring
musicians from all different traditions together to perform one piece without
sacrificing the integrity of their traditions while staying true to Cherry’s vision as
a composer:

But the other way that Don was an influence, of course, and *Relativity Suite* was an important recording, is that Don had a way of bringing...his concept could hold a lot of world...what we call ‘world music,’ I mean everybody lives in the world...but a lot of musics from various cultures and musicians who played music from all kinds of cultures in one umbrella concept. I would say that that’s the biggest door that he opened up for me. That’s something that I try to do that I think I’ve succeeded in doing, or working on doing with Go Organic. (Rudolph interview 2014)

*Relativity Suite* was a piece that was initially performed at NYU by a collection of musicians from the Jazz Composers Orchestra and *qin* player Selene Fung (featured as a soloist on “The Queen of Tung-Ting Lake”) as well as Cherry’s wife Moki playing *tambura*. Some of the pieces featured Cherry exploring Indian classical-influenced vocal music. A weeklong workshop (including a December 1st, 1972 NYU performance Broadcast by WBAI-Radio Free New York (Kassman) that preceded the studio recording was the only time that Wadada Leo Smith would work with Cherry. Smith recalls:

When he did the first Relativity Workshop with the Jazz Composers Orchestra, I was one of the trumpets... Joe McPhee was playing trumpet and I was playing trumpet on the project. That was a week-long project and after the project they went in the studios and recorded. They also recorded that as well, but they decided to do a studio version recording and on that version none of the trumpets were there. (Smith interview 2015)

Although he was not always physically present at the school, Cherry was,
in a very direct way, responsible for the direction and creation of CMS. His influence on subsequent generations interested in intercultural collaboration can still be felt through the music of the many musicians who he touched.

**CMS and Conducted Improvisation**

CMS would also become, through Berger’s large ensemble and the work of Anthony Braxton, an important laboratory of exploring conducted improvisation strategies and systemic approaches to improvisation with large ensembles. CMS gave Braxton a forum to work out many of his musical concepts, including his conducted “language music” improvisations. Berger recalls:

Anthony was a regular at CMS during those years. He workshopped a lot of the music on the Creative Orchestra Music record with the students. We had a kind of orchestra rehearsal every afternoon, always about 20 or 25. He would come for a week. He was a regular there for as long as he lived in Woodstock, starting in 1973. (in Heffley 2012: 396)

Berger also recalls that, “The student bands became big, good resources for composers, Anthony especially. They helped him copy the parts for his Four Orchestras project, and were on hand to play through work as it was written, allowing him to hear it. In the days before computers, that was quite a luxury” (in Heffley 2012:394). Braxton recalls that CMS was the place where he started conducting his language music improvisations,

when I was working at the Woodstock Creative Studio with Karl Berger, factoring language music elements would be a part of my understanding of the new creative orchestra, so that’s how it started. It was a way to have mutable logic psychologies and improvisations, with a...you have circle, and then the rectangle would be the fixed elements. It would be a way to,
with a large ensemble, have the same potential possibilities that I would have coming from free solo music to language music solo music. (Braxton interview 2012)

Karl Berger also developed his own largely intuitive approach to conducted improvisation during his time at the CMS. However, unlike Braxton, Berger explains that he never had any interest in creating a highly developed and organized system.

That started right away, like ’73, ’74, ’75 I got into that. And mainly, the whole point of it was to show that harmonization has nothing to do with the material that you play. It has to do with the mindset of the players, you have to want to harmonize, then you can hear harmony in any sound. You have to train that, so we had a chance, at CMS, to do that. So that there’s really a meaning to having a sound in the center of your instrument and make it all harmonize.... I’m not going there at all, I’m trying to stay as intuitive with the whole thing as possible. Of course it’s limiting, maybe, in one way. But it’s also opening in another...[with too many signs] to my mind, you are not connecting emotionally at all. (Berger interview 2014)

Also around this time, in 1974, in Woodstock but separate from the activities of CMS, Anthony Braxton was helping Walter Thompson develop his concept of “Soundpainting.” As Braxton recalls: “When Walter came to study with me, we went through the traditional method and then we began to open things up, and he began to work with language music, and then 10 years later, 15 years later, he began to look at language music and bring in movement and spatial dynamics in a way that was different from what I was doing” (Braxton interview 2012). In contrast to Berger’s relatively open, intuitive system, Thompson’s conducting language has grown to encompass more than 1000 directives. As Thompson explains:
Soundpainting is the universal multidisciplinary live composing sign language for musicians, actors, dancers, and visual Artists. Presently (2016) the language comprises more than 1200 gestures that are signed by the Soundpainter (composer) to indicate the type of material desired of the performers. (W. Thompson, n.d.)

Adam Rudolph is another CMS participant who has developed his own approach to conducted improvisation. However, he minimizes Berger’s influence on his practice, claiming that he was first exposed to conducted improvisation by Muhal Richard Abrams (b.1930) and The Experimental Band, an important workshop for the musicians of the AACM.

I had seen Muhal Richard Abrams with the Experimental Band, you know, because I grew up in Hyde Park in Chicago so I grew up around...Steve McCall lived a couple doors away from me, and Threadgill lived on 56th street so I used to hear a lot of that music. (Rudolph interview 2014)

Rudolph also notes that variations on conducted improvisation exist in many different cultural contexts, albeit, like Doudou N’Diaye Rose, often informed by Western practices:

I think there’s a lot of it. Then you go to West Africa, to Senegal, and if you see Doudou N’Diaye Rose conducting his sabar group, he conducts THEM too. It’s like, there’s a lot of ways to do these kinds of things and I know a lot of people are doing it, but my language was...like I said I started it in California and just figured out: this is high, this is low, this is up, this is down. (ibid.)

Although Rudolph asserts that he developed his conducting system independently of Berger’s influence (Rudolph interview 2014), he relates that Berger’s *gamala taki* influenced his own thinking about trying to work on a systematic rhythmic pedagogy (Rudolph, n.d.)
In addition to Adam Rudolph, Butch Morris (1947-2013), a cornetist who developed an original conducted improvisation language that he called “Conduction,” is named by Sweet (1996) as a CMS guiding artist.\(^{29}\) Although Sweet cites artists who merely performed at CMS on this list, Morris’ participation suggests that he may have introduced his Conduction concept, in its nascent stages in the early 1980s, to participants there.

Although, admittedly, the lineage of conducted improvisation is extremely complicated, the influence of CMS on a whole generation of musicians’ exposure to a wide variety of systemic approaches cannot be understated. As Adam Tinkle writes, “the early years of CMS seem likely to have been the crucial nexus for the earliest joint articulation of improvised- experimental ‘creative music,’ conducting techniques, and the notion of music-as-language” (Tinkle 2015:248). Furthermore, many CMS students and instructors, including Peter Apfelbaum, Don Davis, Michael Lytle, Sylvain Leroux, and Steve Gorn, have recently performed in Berger and Adam Rudolph’s ensembles.

**Conclusion**

As successful and influential as the school had become, it was unable to survive past the early 1980s. Berger recalls that by the late 1970s,

[T]here was fund-raising, and there was, like, a whole staff. I tell you, the way it was developed organizationally, by ‘78/’79 we could issue student visas, people would come from Europe directly. And the Rockefeller

\(^{29}\) For more on Conduction see Stanley (2009) and Sonderegger (2014).
foundation got involved. If Carter would have been re-elected in 1980 we would still be here now. (Berger interview 2014)

The school would run out of funding for a variety of reasons, but primarily due to decreased funding for the arts, especially creative music, in the 1980s. Karl Berger remembers:

The problem was, when Reagan came into office they stopped all the organizational support. They would support individual artists. So all of a sudden, that whole thing fell apart...We lost the ability to issue student visas within two years. So, they basically destroyed all of these small organizations at the time...If Carter would have stayed in office we would probably still be there now because it was just on the verge of really being established and getting an endowment fund and really becoming a place that was like, solid. It’s not like that, we lost the property, we lost the whole thing. (ibid.)

Creative Music Studio was an important space that allowed interchange between a wide range of scenes and traditions. The school allowed composer/improvisers from across the spectrum to perform with one another and create new connections that they may not have realized in the much more cliquish environs of New York City. In addition to Apfelbaum and Marilyn Crispell, John Lindberg, who would eventually join Anthony Davis and Pheeroan akLaff in Wadada Leo Smith’s group the Golden Quartet in the 2000s, was also a student at the CMS. Through CMS a whole generation of musicians were exposed to innovative Eurological and Afrological musical practitioners and experienced ground-breaking intercultural musical experimentation. Many groups, including the String Trio of New York, originally composed of John Lindberg, Billy Bang (1947-2011) and James Emery (b.1951), and Curlew, founded by saxophonist
George Cartwright (b,1950), featuring Bill Laswell and cellist Tom Cora (1953-1998), were developed at CMS (Sweet 1996:150).

The school served as an important workshop for musicians experimenting with new approaches to conducted improvisation as well as other systemic approaches to improvisation developed by Smith, Braxton, and others. Many of the students who were active in these ensembles would continue playing with Berger and go on to play with other musicians, including CMS guiding artist Adam Rudolph, also exploring original approaches to conducted improvisation. Bill Laswell, who spent time at the school, at the time of this writing uses guiding artists Aiyb Dieng and Hamid Drake, as well as CMS participants Peter Apfelbaum and Steven Bernstein in his ensemble Material. The music of this group is, like many of Laswell’s projects, influenced by the kinds of intercultural music making which accounted for a significant share of the musical activities of CMS. Berger also continues to collaborate with former students, including Laswell, contributing to their more “commercial” projects (VanTrikt 2007:20).

Perhaps most importantly, CMS also offered many of the guiding artists, like Anthony Braxton, Adam Rudolph, and George Lewis seminal teaching experiences in a supportive and non-hierarchical environment that would shape their careers as pedagogues. As Joseph Jarman remembers of the school: “There was an air of mutual respect, which was kind of rare...everyone got cooperation all the time, that’s all they were after” (in Sweet 1996:81). Those artists that presented their concepts at CMS were also able to refine their ideas and develop new ones with greater clarity after the exercise of explaining their musical
philosophies and compositions to a large group of students. Ostensibly, through teaching at CMS, Berger began to realize his original goal of figuring out what he and his musical associates were doing when they were “play[ng] all of this music in the 60s” (Panken 2008). As Wadada Leo Smith relates in a 2011 interview:

the moment you start transmitting that information to another person you begin to learn more about yourself and that information that you carry and that person you are transmitting the information to begins to learn not only what you are showing them but through their inquiry they cause you to create another view of what it is you are trying to present. And you also learn from them. Education gives you this reciprocal notion. You are teaching something you are supposed to know about to someone who is supposed to not know it, but once you begin to interact with them you find out that there is a lot more to what you have that you are teaching that you don't know just from interacting with that person. And that person through their inquiry asks questions you never would have even thought of (in Matzner 2011).
Chapter 4: New Haven and CMS in New York, 1977-1989

The late 1970s and early 1980s are generally neglected in many jazz histories.30 The 1980s are often presented as a decade that represented a significant rupture with the many strands of 1970s experimentation. While what has been described as the “neo-conservative” perspective and the artists associated with it would gain considerable traction in the late 1980s and receive a major boost with Wynton Marsalis’ appointment as the head of the newly created Jazz at Lincoln Center in 1991, the 1980s were a fascinating time for creative music that witnessed exciting new groups, record labels, and approaches. It was also a period during which artists from the AACM and other collectives founded during the 1960s, as well as their associates and protégés, began to realize more fully their dreams of writing orchestral music that incorporated improvisation and composition.

To delve deeply into the recorded and critical history of the 1980s is to discover a fascinating and rich world of music and discourse that has largely been paved over by a revisionist history of the music and the time period, typified by its treatment in Ken Burns’ infamous Jazz documentary, which had major input from Wynton Marsalis and Stanley Crouch (see Porter 2010:2).

Musicians associated with New Haven and CMS were key players in these musical transformations. The late 1970s and early 1980s were also an important

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30 One oft-cited example is Ken Burns’ 2001 documentary, which only briefly features any post-1965 music or musicians. See also Giddins and DeVeaux’s textbook, Jazz a Listening Guide (2011) that dedicates a few perfunctory chapters to the last 30 years of the music.
period when many of the young musicians from the New Haven scene would make their way to New York City and gain much greater recognition on the national and international music scenes. Anthony Davis, Jay Hoggard, and their collaborators would be dubbed the first of the “Young Lions.” The name *Young Lions*, previously used as the title of a 1948 novel, would enter the jazz world with the 1961 Vee Jay release featuring Wayne Shorter, Lee Morgan and Bobby Timmons (all members of Art Blakey’s Jazz Messengers at the time). It would be resurrected into popular usage as the name of one of the first releases of Elektra’s jazz series, *The Young Lions* (1983).

The 1980s were also an era of great artistic interpenetration where it was possible to encounter a magazine like *Down Beat* featuring both Miles Davis and John Cage (December 1984) in the same issue (or Stockhausen and James Newton in April 1983, for that matter). In this chapter, I look at the end of the loft scene in New York, and the changes that the music went through during this period. I explore the connections that musicians active in New Haven and CMS made with other like-minded conceptualists during this period, paying attention to the development of these groups of new approaches to using rhythmic structures and “systemic” approaches to improvisation. I explore the role of these musicians, along with their one time partner and advocate, Stanley Crouch, in what has been termed the “jazz wars” of the 1980s. I also examine Anthony Davis’ work bridging European classical and African American improvised traditions.

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31 Although the original title was to be “The Young Turks,” a move Turkish producer Nesuhi Ertegun voiced his opposition to (Jeske 1982:25).
The End of the “Loft Scene”

In 1977 Anthony Davis, Jay Hoggard, and Pheeroan akLaff left New Haven for New York City. Having already made a name for himself playing as a sideman with Wadada Leo Smith and performing on the *Wildflowers* sessions in 1976, Davis was in demand as a leader and sideman quite soon after his arrival. In New York, Davis and other musicians of the New Haven cohort would find other forward-thinking young musicians to collaborate with. Shortly after arriving in town, Davis and Hoggard would record on AACM member Chico Freeman’s (b. 1949) India Navigation album *Kings of Mali* (1978), along with Art Ensemble percussionist Famadou Don Moye and veteran bassist, Cecil McBee. Chico Freeman’s compositional style, which included a wide range of world influences and conceptual approaches, seems tailor-made to feature the full breadth of Davis and Hoggard’s diverse New Haven experiences. A 1979 *Down Beat* review of the album highlights Freeman’s approach to composition:

‘Look Up’, the opening piece on *Kings of Mali*, Freeman’s second release of India Navigation, illustrates his compositional experiments and abilities; the piece is an abstraction on the number four. Chico states the theme on solo soprano sax with a dazzling whirl of polytonality and spliced rhythms. Hoggard on vibes, joins the melody and takes it, with Chico, through three different time signatures and harmonic changes. The rest of the ensemble restates the theme and collectively improvises, with the only scored requirement being that each musician begin with one aspect of the compositional framework. It could be a rhythmic aspect, a melodic aspect, or a harmonic aspect. Even when one musician is out front soloing, the other musicians are using one or more of the elements of the compositional
It is an ambitious yet solid composition—the abstraction develops into an accessible groove. (Irwin 1979:34)

Freeman’s music contained an emphasis on the incorporation of African and diasporic traditions and highly structured rhythmic experimentation, aspects of the music that Davis and Hoggard had spent their New Haven years exploring. While he didn’t have the same background studying African traditional musics as many of the musicians of the New Haven scene, upon arrival in NYC, Freeman was active in the city’s Latin jazz scene performing with Machito, Ray Barretto, Tito Puente and Eddie Palmieri. Later in his career, Freeman would travel extensively throughout Africa and Eastern Europe in search of intercultural collaborations. As Freeman states in a 2016 interview, "I always had it in my mind that I wanted to base myself somewhere else in the world. I wanted to edify myself about other cultures and how people express music relative to their cultures" (Lloyd 2016). Indeed, the newly arrived musicians of the New Haven cohort would quickly find a group of kindred artists to collaborate with.

Soon after his move, Davis would begin performing in the city as a leader. One of his early New York performances (featuring Hoggard, Freeman and Wesleyan professor Ed Blackwell) was captured in a 1978 Down Beat review. The critic, Scott Albin, begins his article by proclaiming that: “The greatest pleasure of this concert came from hearing a well-rehearsed band playing well-structured, precise music that didn’t ramble on needlessly even in its freest passages. That has not been the norm experienced by these ears in recent months, and so was most welcome and appreciated” (Albin 1978:43).

The concert took place at the Eisner-Lubin Auditorium at NYU, just blocks
from many of the important loft venues of the 1970s, so it would not be out of the
question to assume that Albin is referring to the many downtown loft
performances of the day that valued spontaneity over rigorously prepared
presentations. While there was clearly a wide range of music performed in the
lofts, including Frank Foster’s relatively straight-ahead Loud Minority big band
(“City Scene: New York” 1977:53), the very nature of the loft scene guaranteed a
certain amount of informality. As noted in Chapter 2, Anthony Davis’
performance on Anthony Braxton’s Wildflowers recording was completely
unexpected.

In any case, the gravity of the creative music scene in New York was
moving from loft spaces into more traditional venues in the late 1970s and early
1980s. With this transition from artist-owned lofts to more formal settings, such
as the newly opened venue at the Public Theatre (1977), the Tin Palace (1977)
Sweet Basil (with a greater focus on the avant-garde beginning in the 1980s), and
other downtown sites (as well as midtown spaces such as Soundscape and
others), the focus of the music changed. Performances became increasingly well-
rehearsed, and the music more composed and carefully mapped out.32 David
Murray, who achieved initial notoriety for his free-wheeling “energy music”
performances, notes this stylistic shift in his own music, “It’s still energy music...

Palmer (1977: 57) describes the Tin Palace series: “On weekend afternoons at 3
P.M., the Tin Palace has a continuing avantgarde series, which has presented
some of the more provocative jazz concerts of recent months. Saturday afternoon,
Michael Gregory Jackson, a strikingly original young guitarist (he plays both
acoustic and electric), will perform. Sunday is reserved for Don Moye, the
drummer from the celebrated Art Ensemble of Chicago.”
It’s just conforming to some things that were forgotten for a little while” (in Pareles 1984:A22). In a 1982 piece, Robert Palmer chronicles Murray’s development from relying on extended technique-focused “energy” blowing to incorporating those techniques into a wider compositional and improvisational palette:

> When Mr. Murray first arrived in New York from his native California, in 1975, at the ripe old age of 20, he sounded something like an Ayler throwback. But he has grown considerably since then. While he still goes in for the overblown whistling and shrieking effects Mr. Ayler perfected, he has rethought these and other avant-garde devices within a more traditional rhythmic context. (Palmer 1982:C20)

A 1985 article by Palmer also praises the balance that Murray had developed between the “freedom and discipline of the orchestras of Ellington and Basie while producing daring, visceral music” (Palmer 1985:C12).

**Stylistic Diversity**

As noted in Chapter 2, many of the new transplants from the New Haven scene had diverse interests in playing a multiplicity of musical styles. While many of them were well versed and interested in performing more traditional jazz, Hoggard, akLaff, and Davis found much of their initial work in New York playing with members of the AACM who had arrived in the city several years earlier. Many of the AACM members who would make New York their home arrived in the mid to late 1970s. Although he would eventually move to Woodstock, Anthony Braxton moved to New York in 1969, trombonist Joseph Bowie (b.

Jay Hoggard explains:

> It was all kind of going on at the same time. Whereas, the Vanguard would never have those [AACM] kind of cats play in there. And then you had this gap that was perceived, say, of guys like George Coleman, or Jimmy Heath, or even Cedar [Walton] ...So it was always kind of a drag to me because they were considered the beboppers. And so the beboppers were the harder ones to penetrate to be in that circle, at least for my age group. Because they were, it was just perceived that way, and it was perceived as more closed. So ... I wanted to play with Bu [Art Blakey] when I first went to town, but I would get gigs more with guys like Moye and Blackwell. (Hoggard interview 2014)

By 1979, the musicians who left Connecticut had also found a group of similarly young, like-minded musicians to perform with. Davis and akLaff continued an association with St. Louis transplant Oliver Lake that began when Leo Smith put together the band that recorded *Song of Humanity* in New Haven. Michael Gregory Jackson, who had worked at CMS in 1976, put together his own group using akLaff, and other musicians who would come to collaborate on many occasions with members of the New Haven cohort, including Jerome Harris (from Brooklyn), and Black Artists Group-associated musicians from St. Louis, Marty Ehrlich and Baikida Carroll (Safane 1980:30).

Gerry Hemingway would continue playing with Mark Helias, with whom he formed a trio with Chicago native Ray Anderson (b. 1952), an excellent trombonist and childhood friend of George Lewis’. Like their New Haven ties, the
connections that these musicians would make in New York would continue to be important for many years, and in many instances these associations would continue until the present.

One of the more productive relationships was the one formed between Anthony Davis and James Newton (b.1953), a young flautist/composer who had recently arrived from Los Angeles. Originally introduced to Davis by Stanley Crouch, Davis and Newton would form a quartet with Pheeroan akLaff and Rick Rozie, and a trio with Abdul Wadud (b.1947), represented on the records *Hidden Voices* (1979) on India Navigation (quartet adding George Lewis on some tracks) and *I've Known Rivers* (1982) (trio with Wadud) on Gramavision. As Lee Jeske writes in a *Down Beat* magazine profile of Newton, “The two men were natural musical soulmates, and their talents grew with their reputations” (1983:26).

Although many AACM musicians of the previous generation were accepting of the younger experimentalists, James Newton recalls that some musicians were highly critical of their performance of older material, placing them in the middle of the AACM debate over the validity of performing “standard music” vs. “original music.” James Newton felt that it was important to still play the music of Mingus and others alongside their own original music. He recalls that an older musician associated with the earlier generation of the avant-garde was critical of their choice of repertoire:

one musician that I greatly respect said, ‘Well, you guys were up there bopping.’ And we didn’t feel like that, we felt like here is one of the really great compositions in the canon that still needed to be heard, and it was heard on a tour in 1964 by Mingus’ ensemble then. (Newton interview
The 1980s and the Ubiquitous “Return to Tradition”

One important narrative well into the decade of the 1980s was that the music was entering a new era defined by the incorporation of the advances of the previous two decades into the creation of a new aesthetic. This changed markedly with the ascension of Wynton Marsalis to jazz superstardom after winning Grammy awards for both his jazz (Think of One, 1983) and classical (Hayden, Hummel, L. Mozart: Trumpet Concertos, 1983) records in February 1984, and Marsalis’ increasing alignment with Stanley Crouch and Albert Murray, the theorists of a “neoconservative” jazz philosophy. Interviews with musicians and articles in Down Beat, Coda, and the New York Times (as well as record company advertisements) present a clear picture of this tendency. According to this narrative, young musicians like Anthony Davis, David Murray, and others active in the loft scene were creating new forms and approaches that were informed by the rich history of the music, a history that now included the development of new procedural approaches to improvisation and the cross-cultural collaborations of the 1970s.

In many contemporary writings, the 1980s were characterized as a decade

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33 An early mention of this term can be found in Robert Palmer’s 1983 article, “FREE JAZZ COMES UNDER FIRE.” Palmer writes, “The trumpeter Leo Smith and his early associate Anthony Braxton are often criticized because their music's rhythmic momentum isn’t ‘swing’ as the neo-conservatives understand it” (H27).

34 Porter writes in depth about this philosophy and the relationship between Crouch, Marsalis, and Murray in Chapter 7 of What is This Thing Called Jazz? (2004).
that refined rather than rejected the musical advances of the 1970s. Dan Morgenstern in a 1980 evaluation of the 1970s writes:

It is no coincidence that so many of the most promising players of today directly or indirectly emerged from the AACM movement coming out of Chicago and into the mainstream of the music--A development symbolized by Muhal Richard Abrams’ move to New York. Freeman, George Lewis, Ray Anderson, Arthur Blythe, James Newton, Douglas Ewart and Anthony Davis all have been touched and shaped by what began as a local phenomenon but by the end of the ’70s had reached all corners of the jazz world. (1980:19)

A 1980 interview with alto saxophonist Arthur Blythe (then a rising star on Columbia records) further illustrates the contemporary understanding of where jazz and creative music were presumed to be heading. Blythe states: “We’re going into another decade, and that has a psychological effect on people...I think too that this might be a period when a synthesis of what has preceded and more recent concepts is coming into being. Everything that was good, and is good, is cool” (in Blumenthal 1980:64). Blythe goes on to evaluate the legacy of the musical revolutions of the 60s, “you don’t have to reject everything that has been dealt with already and go look for the new horizons, because you could be out in the dark where you don’t see shit” (ibid.). Blythe also speaks of his continuing interest in intercultural collaboration (albeit in a half-joking manner, in language that would make many ethnomusicologists cringe), one of the defining musical legacies of the 1970s, stating: “I’d like to do some stuff with some pygmies, some heavy pygmy shit-that would be a gas. Or go down to South America and do some things with the bush Indians” (ibid.).
While much was made of jazz’s return to tradition going into the 1980s, this was by no means a new idea or conceptual orientation. Some authors locate this affinity firmly within the 1970s. In 1983, Bill Shoemaker writes that: “Creative music can be characterized, in a very general way, on a decade by decade basis. As energy and spirituality were the hallmarks of the sixties, and as structure and tradition were the watchwords of the seventies, the eighties are beginning to pivot upon a sense of ritual, which can be viewed as a sensibility that synthesizes those of the past two decades” (Shoemaker 1983:6). Shoemaker sees the 1980s as a period when there would be a revisiting and critical reassessment of the 1960s focus on spirituality through the lens of the formal advances of the 1970s. Ostensibly, Shoemaker, when speaking of structure and tradition, was referring to the music of Anthony Braxton, and the more structured music of AACM-affiliated artists, and not the “energy music” of many of the other loft scene participants (who were, based on Shoemaker’s characterization, operating under a 1960s model).

Ronald Radano, examining Anthony Braxton’s critical reception, also identifies a longing for a return to a sense of tradition in the 1970s, writing that: “Braxton spoke to the puzzling pastiche of 1970s’ style and culture...As a tradition-centered synthesis, he would, according to the critical view, make sense of the anarchy of the recent past by redefining it aesthetically in the context of the mainstream” (1995:190). If Braxton was to make sense of the “puzzling pastiche” of 1970s style, then it was up to Arthur Blythe, Anthony Davis, David Murray, the World Saxophone Quartet, and a host of others to make sense of the even more
puzzling pastiche of the 1980s, set against a backdrop of increasing Reagan-era conservatism. No doubt the focus of critics on this “return to tradition” and constant pressure to redefine the music during this period would influence Anthony Braxton’s assertion that,

One of the most basic distortions that have come to permeate black creative music is the notion that every given thrust extension must necessarily represent a breakage in the composite identity of the music...The end result of this phenomenon is directly related to the progressional ‘jazz is dead’ death wish that has regularly been a feature in the information dynamics surrounding this music. (Braxton 1985: 240)

Clearly, within the circle of New Haven’s creative musicians, especially those who had spent time absorbing Wadada Leo Smith’s considerable attention to the history of the music, this “return to tradition” was not a new concept. Gerry Hemingway had spent the mid-1970s performing tributes to the musicians who he regarded as important innovators on his instrument. Furthermore, the manner in which Hemingway went about choosing which artists to pay tribute to, and the best way to represent their enduring legacies shows a careful attention to the history of the jazz and creative music tradition instilled in him by Wadada Leo Smith. Acknowledging his debt to Smith’s influence, Hemingway explains:

the solo thing kind of emanated primarily out of Leo, and primarily out of my then growing curiosity about tradition. About the whole tradition of the instrument. So my first concert has a dedication to Chick Webb, which now shows up, finally after all these years, on my latest solo record. ... Every half a year or so I would give another one [solo concert]. . . . the thread of them was that there was a dedication to an innovator on my instrument. So I picked, first of all, Chick Webb because he was really one
of the first people to ever offer something that would constitute a drum solo and he had a huge influence over many soloists to follow, Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich being the most obvious ones, but there are many others...He was my first subject, and the second one was Max Roach, the third one was Sunny Murray, and the fourth one was Tony Williams and these were the people. So at one point in the program I would do a dedication to them. (Gerry Hemingway interview 2014)

The idea of incorporating more traditional influences into avant-garde, conceptually based music was also an approach that Anthony Davis had been experimenting with since his earliest recording in 1972 with Leo Smith:

*Reflectactivity* is dedicated to Duke Ellington, so that meant a lot to me when I played the music. There’s stuff in there, I was kind of playing stride but in a more abstract way of playing stride, but yet it’s still stride on some level. (Davis interview 2014)

A 1982 feature on Anthony Davis titled “New Music Traditionalist” emphasizes Davis’ place as a new generation of musician, albeit a generation with historical continuity with the avant-garde innovators of the 60s and 70s. Francis Davis writes:

[Anthony] Davis is in the forefront of a new generation of musicians who can claim the hard-won advances of Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, and Anthony Braxton as their starting point, who can embrace the distant jazz past without compromising their positions as modernists, and who can borrow structural devices and instrumental techniques from European concert music without jeopardizing their places in the Afro-American continuum. (Francis Davis 1982: 21)

In his interview, Anthony Davis continues to champion the more calculated aesthetic that impressed critic Scott Albin some 4 years earlier, asserting that, “it’s important now to reassert some control, because at this point in the music
there’s been too much random noise” (ibid. 22).

In a 1984 feature on current trends in the music, entitled “Swing Back to Tradition,” which in many ways echoes the general narrative set forth in Francis Davis’ piece, Jon Pareles of the New York Times attempts to explain the complexity of the era. Many of the members of the groups that Pareles cites are associated with CMS or New Haven, or had recently arrived in the city from the West Coast or Midwest Collectives.

...after decades in which forms have been defied and shattered, a new generation of jazz composers have begun to rebuild. They are well-schooled, often in both jazz and the classics; they take virtuosity for granted. They organize bands that draw on not only the entire sweep of jazz - from African roots to swing to free-form improvisation - but the sonorities of folk music from around the world and the complex structures of classical music as well. Such ambitious composers as David Murray, Anthony Davis, Henry Threadgill, Craig Harris, Douglas Ewart, David Holland, James Newton, Ronald Shannon Jackson, John Carter and Butch Morris are working their own transformations of older traditions. (1984:A22)

Even though some artists that Pareles names aren’t directly associated with the New Haven and CMS scenes, there are close ties between many of these artists and cohorts. For example, David Murray’s group at the time featured Anthony Davis and George Lewis, and Henry Threadgill’s Sextet featured Pheeroan akLaff. Douglas Ewart, an AACM member who recorded with Davis and Lewis on Lewis’ recording Homage to Charles Parker (1979), is listed as a CMS guiding artist by Sweet (1996:16). Ronald Shannon Jackson, who is also listed as a guiding artist by Sweet, is best known for his work with Ornette Coleman, in Coleman’s group...
Prime Time that explored the harmolodic concept in a groove-based environment. Dave Holland was also a CMS guiding artist and a part of the Woodstock musical community. James Newton and Butch Morris were both associated with UGMAA and Newton would become a close collaborator of Anthony Davis.

While he raises many important issues and describes a vital artistic renaissance, Pareles goes one step further to conflate the music of these artists with the philosophies of Albert Murray, a major influence on the thinking of Wynton Marsalis and Stanley Crouch (Porter 2002), perhaps setting a template for how future scholars would understand the 1980s.

'We are in a period of transition,' says Albert Murray (no relation to David), the novelist and author of 'Stomping the Blues,’ who is now adapting Count Basie's reminiscences into an autobiography. ‘There is a breakdown of certain conventions in society, and that doesn't send people looking in all directions. It sends them looking for fundamentals. It might be called postavant-gardism.’ (Pareles 1984:A22)

Contextualizing these developments through Albert Murray’s contention that “there is a breakdown of certain conventions in society,” Pareles presents the further development and refinement of concepts introduced into the music during the loft era, paradoxically, as a rejection of the 1970s experimentation that brought them into being. Furthermore, with Murray’s words, Pareles ties the musical “Swing Back to Tradition” to a societal return to tradition and rejection of 1960s and 70s radicalism.

However, Sweet also lists Pheeroan akLaff and Michael Gregory Jackson, who both related that they only attended CMS as performers (akLaff interview 2016, Jackson interview 2017).
Indeed, it would be hard to square the philosophical outlook and eclecticism of these composers associated with the AACM, UGMAA, and CMS with the increasingly neoconservative views of Wynton Marsalis and Stanley Crouch. An equally valid model for the “reclamation” and “transformation” of tradition can be found in the Art Ensemble of Chicago’s motto “Great Black Music: Ancient to Future,” which celebrated the full gamut of Afro-diasporic creativity from the most traditional to the most avant-garde. The movement toward incorporating older jazz styles and traditions in the 1980s was described as a major change to existing paradigms in the music. However, as noted earlier, this tendency was already a hallmark of the musical collectives emerging during the Black Arts Movement. One can find a very similar aesthetic in the work of the late 60s and early 70s St. Louis collective, the Black Artists Group:

This kind of fusion worked...as Ajulé Rutlin wrote, ‘to absorb the traditions of the ancestors and to extend them in positive directions.’ Ideally, this multidisciplinary black aesthetic would harness traditional forms to avant-garde technique and contemporary subject matter, unifying various modes of expression into a medium that conveyed the black artistic heritage. (Looker 2004:101)

Pareles goes on to list a who’s who of the newly formed creative music ensembles of 1984, and to offer up a new moniker to describe their music:

Some of the most exciting music anywhere is now being made by an axis of groups whose style might be called avant-gutbucket jazz - a loose rubric for the music of David Murray’s big band and octet, the Henry Threadgill Sextet, Craig Harris’s Aqua Band, Olu Dara’s Okra Orchestra, Ronald Shannon Jackson and the Decoding Society, the Dave Holland Quintet, the Butch Morris Ensemble and other ‘little big bands,’ as they have been
dubbed. At their best, these bands don’t just look back; they offer a kaleidoscopic view of jazz from the roots up. (Pareles 1984:A22)

Just as there was little acknowledgement at the time of the connections between Leo Smith’s more conceptually based music and its frequent references (however oblique) to the history of jazz and creative music, equally little attention was paid in the early 1980s to the importance of so-called “avant-gutbucket” groups towards new process-based approaches to improvisation and rhythmic advances.36

Most of the contemporaneous coverage of process-based approaches to improvisation seemed to focus on the musicians of what George Lewis has labeled the Downtown II scene (2004) revolving around John Zorn and their relationship to European and Euro-American experimentalists. In a 1984 Down Beat profile, Zorn, while acknowledging his debt as an alto player to Braxton and Ornette Coleman, name-checks a list of European and Euro-American composers when asked about his “compositional outlook,” stating:

I’m no longer interested in specific sound. I’m interested only in the relationships involved, in defining a territory and then letting improvisers play around in that territory. It’s the kind of thing that composers like Henri Pousseur and Pierre Boulez dabbled with in the late ‘50s-working in an open form, having things to shift around. It’s also similar to Earle Brown’s open-form works. (in Milkowski 1984:45)

While Zorn does acknowledge his music’s indebtedness to the study of

36 To be fair, Howard Mandel, a consistent advocate for the music of Butch Morris, does an excellent job describing Morris’ Conduction® practice (which was still in an early stage of development) in a 1986 piece on Morris’ music. He also acknowledges that Morris has also been: “To all but the most attentive jazz or ‘new music’ fans and players in the U.S. and Europe...a seldom recognized, not to say invisible man.” (Mandel 1986:26)
bebop, and the influence of Coleman and Braxton, coverage of John Zorn continues to be largely within the context of his place in a Euro-American experimental tradition. This is an important fact that George Lewis (a frequent collaborator of Zorn’s) discusses in relation to the Downtown II school that Zorn is associated with, noting, “Downtown II’s press coding as white, however, is not only at variance with this image of transcendence but seems to have little basis in either New York City’s geography or musical affinities” (G. Lewis 2004a:90).

As Lewis, and Dessen (2003) point out, press coverage of the music of Downtown II was often contextualized in terms of Euro-American experimentalism. Meanwhile members of the same circle of critics would label groups that shared significant “geographical and musical affinities” as “avant-gutbucket” “little big bands.” This ultimately had the effect of segregating members of the downtown experimental music community (at least in the press’s imagination). This focus on difference would serve to obscure the myriad connections between members of what was ultimately a dynamic, interconnected group of young experimentalists with a background in a wide array of improvised traditions.

“Avant-Gutbucket” Groups and New Compositional Approaches

These “avant-gutbucket” groups were fertile ground for musicians to experiment with new approaches to improvisation and composition. While they may have sounded somewhat “traditional” on a surface level, they were experimenting with approaches that would become quite influential in the
coming years. Graham Haynes, a member of David Murray’s big band and a longtime collaborator of Butch Morris’, acknowledges that many of the concepts and signals that Morris would later use in his own Conduction system were developed during his time conducting Murray’s group:

I think he might have developed a lot of the stuff for the Conduction from working with...from conducting Murray’s big band and that goes back to the 80’s, he was conducting that band in ’82, ’83. You know, they had a lot of written material... from what I remember from playing with Butch with David we’d have, like I said, he would take a whole... eight bars or twelve bars or however many bars and he would say ‘Ok, put a circle around those twelve bars, and then put number 1,’ so that would be memory 1, and then he’d say, ‘Ok, put a circle around letter A’ and then letter A would be number 2, and so memory 1, memory 2, so I think he might have developed it from there. (Haynes interview 2013)

Morris’ involvement with Murray’s band, whose 1982 octet featured Morris, Anthony Davis, George Lewis, Henry Threadgill, and Steve McCall, represents another link between the musicians of the New Haven cohort, the AACM and the West Coast Collective UGMAA.

Similarly, CMS guiding artist and Woodstock resident Dave Holland’s group was an important vehicle for Steve Coleman to experiment with the new rhythmic concepts that he had learned as a sideman working with drummer Doug Hammond (b.1942). Coleman recalls of the group: “Basically, Dave was doing things similar to [his well-regarded ECM recording] Conference of the Birds. New stuff came from what I had done with Doug Hammond, and things [drummer Marvin] Smitty Smith was doing. I’d got into studying rhythms right before I joined Doug Hammond, to correct the bad time I’d had for so long” (in Mandel
An excellent example of one of these new concepts can be found in Hammond’s piece “Perspicuity” on the 1985 Dave Holland Quintet recording *Seeds of Time*. The form of the piece is organized around a “drum chant,” that becomes the basis for improvisation. This is a significant departure from the more traditional idea of organizing a piece around a cyclical harmonic form.

Anthony Davis, who is mentioned in Pareles’ 1984 article, would use his group to explore what he would later refer to as “rhythm drama,” combinations of different rhythmic cycles that would interact in surprising ways. Drawn from his study of Carnatic music and Indonesian gamelan traditions, Davis would continue to refine this concept to create a singular musical vision.

Davis’ “Wayang II” (published in 1980), an early piece written using overlapping cycles, is an excellent illustration of how these cycles work. The score begins with the vibraphone (Jay Hoggard), violin (Shem Guibbory), and cello (Abdul Wadud) playing in 5/4. The score is only 3 pages long and specifies the basic musical material that the piece is derived from. The form of the piece consists of a cycle that develops as Davis gradually overlays parts in 5/4, 7/4, 11/4 and 9/4 and would take an extraordinary 3465 beats to resolve, or 693 bars of 5. Although the musicians stay more or less in the zones that they are relegated to, at around 3:10 the strings (and to some extent, the pitched percussion) begin to improvise using the thematic/rhythmic material that they have been given in the score creating a dense highly layered structure (also giving the musicians a way out of having to complete the whole cycle). By the time the improvisation becomes more frantic and active, the bass clarinet (bass in the score) and
trombone have a semi-rubato melody. Davis describes how this piece is arranged:

you have that seven against five creating a thirty five beat cycle and then
you add eleven which takes you to three hundred and eighty five beat cycle
and I had the line so that things changed. Large-scale things changed with
the mathematics. So after ....seventy beats, actually something happens,
and then after 385, so that was how I conceived the music. That kind of set
the stage for ‘Wayang No. 4,’ which had even more elaborate rhythmic
structures which, eventually I wrote it for orchestra using choirs of
instruments to articulate different large-scale rhythmic structures. That
developed into X where the rhythmic bed creates the...I call it ‘rhythm
drama,’ and a lot of that is from gamelan music, the idea....When I heard I
thought of it as kind of a rhythmic drama. (Davis interview 2014)

This concept of creating larger cycles by superimposing multiple
smaller cycles would become an increasingly important part of jazz and creative
music practice. Some time after Davis’ 1980s compositions, Steve Coleman and
Adam Rudolph would create their own ways of dealing with this development,
perhaps independently of Davis’ experiments. Coleman used this approach
famously to collaborate with Afro-Cuban traditional musicians on his recording
\textit{The Sign and the Seal} (1996). Michael Dessen describes how this works in
practice:

After a twelve-second introduction by AfroCuba, Coleman’s group enters
and, for the rest of the piece, simultaneously performs rhythms structured
around beat groupings of 4 and a half, 9, 18, and so forth. Although they
are working with the same underlying quarter-note pulse as AfroCuba, the
cycles Coleman’s group plays create a 9:8 (or 4:5:4 or 18:16) ratio with
those of AfroCuba. (Dessen 2004:180)

Although Coleman’s cycles are much shorter than Davis’ and work as a way to
incorporate traditional Afro-Cuban rhythms into his own concept, the parallels
suggest a similarity in compositional thought.

Adam Rudolph who, like Steve Coleman, grew up in Chicago and collaborated at an early age with artists associated with the AACM, would also devise a similar concept, cyclical verticalism, that would allow him to superimpose multiple cycles of rhythms of different lengths. Rudolph, as mentioned in Chapter 3, was a close collaborator of Don Cherry’s and a CMS guiding artist in the early 1980s. He recalls that his concept of cyclic verticalism emerged from his studies of world percussion traditions beginning in the 1970s, merging African polyrhythmic concepts with the complex mathematics of North Indian and Turkish drumming: “at some point I started to realize that you could combine these cycles as in North Indian music or also in Turkish drumming and so on...combine them with these polyrhythms.... so cyclic verticalism is the concept and then they become combined” (Rudolph interview 2014). Like fellow Chicagoan Coleman, who “likes to hear a dance element in my own music” (in Dessen 2003: 161), Rudolph is invested in making sure that each of these rhythms groove, stating “they have to groove, they have to have a body element to them” (Rudolph interview 2014).

Although these three artists have never performed together, they inhabit similar musical worlds, which have been recently brought together by Wadada Leo Smith and CMS, respectively. Rudolph and Davis performed together with Wadada Leo Smith’s Golden Quintet as part of Smith’s 2015 Stone residency, and Steve Coleman performed with Rudolph and Gnawa musician Hassan Hakmoun at the 2016 CMS workshop. Coleman and Davis were both a
part of David Murray’s groups, but missed each other by a few years with Davis recording on the Black Saint Octet releases *Ming* (1980) and *Home* (1981), and Coleman recording on the Butch Morris-conducted *Live at Sweet Basil, Vol. 1 and 2* (1984).

**Gramavision Records**

One of the most well-funded and celebrated labels documenting the new music of the 1980s was Gramavision Records, a label started by Davis’ Yale classmate Jonathan F. P. Rose. Issuing its first record in 1980, Gramavision would eventually feature many of the artists that were previously signed to India Navigation, including Davis, James Newton, and Jay Hoggard.

India Navigation, a label documenting many of the artists active on the loft scene, was started by Bob Cummins, a corporate lawyer and avant-garde jazz fan, who supervised all of the label’s recordings. Their first release was of a 1972 concert by the Revolutionary Ensemble, a trio of AACM member violinist Leroy Jenkins, bassist Sirone, and percussionist/pianist Jerome Cooper. Ratliff writes that, “Cummins was devoted to recording the free, open-ended music of young New York musicians. It was a time when major record labels and jazz clubs were focusing on electric fusion or other commercial possibilities in jazz; fans like Mr. Cummins gave their time to create an influential underground scene virtually from scratch” (Ratliff 2000: 1.48).

Gramavision, with a much larger budget and better resources than India Navigation, was poised to become a major player in presenting the cutting-edge
of 1980s creative music. One of the earlier records that Gramavision released was Anthony Davis’ *Episteme* (1981), featuring Davis’ Connecticut crew of Jay Hoggard, Pheroan akLaff, Dwight Andrews, Rick Rozie, and George Lewis, augmented by BAG member JD Parran, and percussionist Warren Smith, the proprietor of Studio WIS. *Episteme* garnered a five star review from *Down Beat*, and would be the first release featuring Davis’ larger ensemble (although *Variations in Dreamtime* [1982] was recorded one year earlier). Gramavision, which was distributed by PolyGram, began advertising in *Down Beat* on a fairly regular basis, often with full-page advertisements beginning in 1984. The label’s advertising projected a future-thinking outlook, focusing on the “New Music of the ‘80s.”

By 1986 the label had released quite a few excellent, and critically acclaimed albums, notably Davis’ work with Episteme, Newton’s solo albums, as well as *Still Waters* (1982) an offering by Newton and Davis’ collaborative trio with Abdul Wadud. The label also featured the work of one of Newton’s LA mentors, John Carter, who, like Ornette Coleman, grew up in Fort Worth and was an “early associate of Coleman’s in Texas” (Palmer 1981:D17). Based in Los Angeles, Carter cultivated a similar aesthetic to many of the artists of the New Haven scene and the AACM, creating multi-sectioned works that combined composition and improvisation in sophisticated and novel ways.

Carter used a variety of conceptual approaches, including Coleman’s harmolodic approach. Many of his pieces included sections wherein the group spontaneously improvised forms derived from Carter’s composed materials.
Pareles mentions that like Anthony Davis, Carter “has taken the post avant-garde direction of complex structures and extended pieces away from the bandstand toward the concert stage” (1984:A22). His music was also deeply rooted in earlier jazz styles, and informed by contemporary classical music. In a 1981 piece reviewing Carter’s albums *Night Fire* (1979) and *Variations* (1980) featuring James Newton, Palmer writes:

> The instrumentation suggests a kind of chamber jazz, and Mr. Carter’s themes and scoring, as well as the improvised interaction between the musicians, do suggest influences from contemporary classical music. But Mr. Carter and Mr. Bradford were early associates of Ornette Coleman in Texas, and their roots, like his, are in more directly expressive brands of music such as rhythm-and-blues. (Palmer 1981:D17)

Carter, who began his “Roots and Folklore” series with the 1982 album *Dauwhe* on the Italian Black Saint label, would continue to release further installments on Gramavision, beginning with *Castles of Ghana* (1986), an exploration of the relationship between African and Afro-diasporic music and culture. Carter describes the inspiration for the album:

> Well, my older son went to the University of California at Santa Barbara, and has a degree in African Studies, with emphasis on religion and sociology, and stuff like that. In ’73, he went to Ghana and Nigeria in support of the things he had learned out of the books. So when he came back, he talked about the things he’d done, and one of the most interesting things to me was the castles along the coast of Ghana. And we talked about that, and right away there was music attached to the whole phenomenon, in my mind. (Carter interviewed by Eggert 1989)

Carter’s mix of highly-composed, forward-thinking arrangements, free improvisation, and use of elements of African and Afro-Diasporic roots music,
from African drumming to field hollers to the blues, fit the aesthetic of the label well, typifying the “avant-gutbucket” concept that Pareles articulated a few years earlier. Furthermore, *Castles of Ghana* (1986), with its intercultural collaborations and focus on African cultural retentions in the Americas, was a perfect match for the label as well as the musical and cultural landscape of the early 1980s. It also easily fit into the model established by recordings like Anthony Davis’ *Hemispheres*, an album which I discuss in depth later.

Additionally, the record featured frequent Davis collaborator, woodwind virtuoso Marty Ehrlich (b. 1955), and trumpeter Baikida Carroll (b.1947), a BAG member who collaborated often with Oliver Lake and shared the front line with Ehrlich on Michael Gregory Jackson’s Arista Novus release *Heart and Center* (1979).

With Gramavision, Rose focused on the music of a few different New York subscenes. These included free-funk albums by Ornette Coleman’s Prime Time-era bassist Jamaladeen Tacuma, like *Jukebox* (1988), and more fusion-oriented albums, like John Scofield’s *Blue Matter* (1987). The label also featured projects like Billy Hart’s *Oshumare* (1985), featuring Kevin Eubanks, Steve Coleman, and Dave Holland, which (while it was well within the mainstream of 1980s jazz) drew from contemporary fusion and the influence of a nascent M-BASE movement.

Releasing a wide variety of albums featuring New York’s new hybrid approaches to musical production, Rose was able to craft a relatively coherent vision for the label. While Gramavision’s production would taper off in the 1990s, it continued to put out quite a few important and critically acclaimed releases,
including the 1996 release of Don Cherry sideman and CMS-associated multi-
instrumentalist/composer Peter Apfelbaum’s *Luminous Charms*. With a focus on
progressive, often world music-influenced jazz and fusion, Gramavision’s
productions were the antithesis of the neoconservative trend. Throughout the
mid-1980s Gramavision also developed a signature visual style, often featuring
geometric abstractions on the covers of their albums.37

Hoggard’s and akLaff’s albums on Gramavision, as well as Oliver Lake’s
Hoggard-produced *Jump Up!* (1983), represent a departure from the complex,
highly composed music that they had performed together in Anthony Davis’
ensemble. These projects hew much closer to the sound that they had developed
working together in Déjà Vu. Recorded a year after his more adventurous *Mystic
(1983) focused on more melodic, beat-driven material. Hoggard was initially
celebrated by critics for his adventurous, virtuosic vibraphone solos; *Love
Survives*, however, was panned by many of the people who thought that he had
abandoned (what they perceived to be) his post-bop and avant-garde roots.
Hoggard recalls that many of the critics that were supportive of his more avant-
garde work were appalled by his more commercial fusion-oriented projects,
preferring someone that simply filled “a template” of what they expected to see in
a “jazz” artist. As his musical profile rose, Hoggard believes that his interests in
performing music with many different aesthetic leanings became a liability for
him rather than an asset (Hoggard interview 2014).

37 See John Carter’s albums *Fields* (1988) and Oliver Lake’s albums *Gallery*
(1988) and *Otherside* (1988), for some iconic examples.
akLaff’s project, which was rather ambitious in its scope, ran into several problems. At the time, he was trying to create music that was influenced by his international experiences as well as a desire to “make our society more harmonious.”

I was probably the most misunderstood musician of all the people that you know in the music scene during that time, of all my cohort. . . . I had been associated with and pretty much identified with people of high academic achievement, people with a unique voice and great musicianship. . . . But my mindset was completely international, because I was even more politicized, if you will, than anyone, well not more than Malachi Favors, but I was politicized and focused on a metaphysical reality or not reality. Something beyond where I was more than the average guy looking for a gig. . . . the most important thing for me during the 80s was to make my music and my life come together and do what might have been done by someone who was interested in healing a nation from its problems. I had the subtle goals and desires to make our society more harmonious. (akLaff interview 2016a)

Another one of his goals with the project was to create music that had the potential for radio airplay. As akLaff recalls,

It was an interesting period in that, for us, recording meant opportunities to get on the radio and to sell records because we were already working. So it was all convoluted. Doing a record became a way to get into other areas that were more lucrative. We already had [interesting] performance work. (ibid.)

akLaff’s *Fits Like a Glove* (1983), which featured his New Haven compatriots Michael Gregory Jackson and Dwight Andrews, is a danceable funk and disco-influenced EP. The title track, featuring drum programming, hypnotic bass grooves, with an emphasis on repetitive vocals and minimal extended
improvisation (with the notable exception of Jackson’s bluesy guitar solo), would have been perfectly at home on an early 1980s FM R&B station. According to akLaff, he came very close to his goal of receiving commercial airplay, but was ultimately unsuccessful because of Rose’s unwillingness to pay radio stations to play it. akLaff recalls:

A guy from the radio station said, ‘I want to play that tune of yours.’ And in the 80s payola was still going on. So, but it was couched in a very friendly, business way . . . . So the woman who was working the record, as they say, would just basically go down there and meet the disc jockey and say, ‘C’mon, play this record for me, da da da, here’s your check.’ She said, ‘Well, he played it and he’ll play it again, and he’ll put it on as much as you want but it’ll be, like $200 a week.’ And me as a young man, thinking, ‘$200 a week for a millionaire like Jonathan [Rose], that’s nothing!, right?’ I’m sure he pays $200 a week for his maid, so why not a record that could be a hit record and bring in $700 a week maybe... His thing was, ‘Oh no, that’s payola.’ (ibid.)

akLaff recalls that it was rare to hear any Gramavision records on the air in New York City.

At that time I don’t think that any of those India Navigation or Gramavision records were going on any radio. They might have been going on Columbia’s radio station. (ibid.)

Another complicating factor for akLaff was his membership in Oliver Lake’s collective group, Jump Up, a project which also merged the divide between the avant-garde and contemporary black popular music. While many more commercial albums by musicians associated with the avant-garde were often viewed critically as attempts to “sell out,” Lake was always very clear about the desire for his music to reach as many people as possible. Since his early days in
the Black Artists Group, Oliver Lake had always sought for his music to be commercially successful. Looker writes:

For others, suggestions that their musical approaches were too esoteric, too impenetrable, for most listeners never failed to irritate. Shortly after leaving Missouri, Lake protested that it was ‘ridiculous’ to claim that the new styles weren’t commercially viable: ‘The music is commercial,’ he insisted; ‘It could be, if people were exposed to it.’ (2004:183)

Just as he had been attempting to do in the late 60s and 1970s, Lake was aiming to cultivate as broad an audience as possible. A Down Beat reviewer seems to have understood this, writing in a review of the group: “perhaps the perfect fusion in music is not between genres, but between broad appeal and effective artistry. The Lake band found that harmony for two hours on this evening...One hopes that they will return with the spark still lit, or at least the vinyl to prove it had flamed once” (Freedman 1982: 50).

While the Hoggard-produced 1983 album Plug It is far from Lake’s most adventurous offering, it is an intriguing work of art. akLaff’s compositions feature him singing his original lyrics, giving the listener a good idea of what akLaff means (especially on “No More Wars”) when he talked about his “subtle goals and desires to make our society more harmonious.” Taking a different approach than akLaff, Lake’s lyrical content engages in the ribald double entendre of the blues tradition, and references modern technologies and political theories. Of particular interest is the danceable, 80s funk of “Trickle Down Theory” that ties Reagan’s disastrous economic policies to Lake’s love life (“you know you’ve got a lot of love, and I’m waiting for the overflow”). Lake’s alto solo at 3:04 alternates between avant-garde flurries and funk vocabulary and mannerisms that could
have been a model for John Zorn’s schizophrenic approach later in the 80s. akLaff’s contributions also allow him to flex the reggae chops that he began honing since his Déjà Vu days, first featured with Lake on the piece “Change One” from Lake’s Arista Novus release *Life Dance of Is* (1979).

In the 1990s, close to the time period that would mark the end for Gramavision, Peter Apfelbaum would record a single album on the label. By the time he recorded *Luminous Charms* (1996), the headquarters of Gramavision had moved from Manhattan to Salem, Massachusetts. He was introduced to the label by Hans Wendl, Apfelbaum’s friend and manager, who had just been hired to head Gramavision. Apfelbaum recalls:

> Before that it had been [Jonathan F.P. Rose] and ... it had been kind of a different era... But Hans basically took it over from him and it kind of became a new era of Gramavision. (Apfelbaum interview 2016b)

*Luminous Charms* is one of the best documents of Apfelbaum’s Bay Area-based Hieroglyphics group. Influenced by his work with Don Cherry and studies of many Afro-diasporic popular and traditional musics, Apfelbaum’s compositions tread many stylistic and conceptual boundaries. The original inspiration to form Hieroglyphics was Apfelbaum’s introduction to the JCOA, which seemed to present the kind of approach that Apfelbaum was attracted to in the music of Cecil Taylor and AACM artists in a big band format.

> It sounds composed, but what was powerful to me was the combination of these composed segments with purely improvised music. And of course, they weren’t playing chord changes and I don’t remember any of that music having any strict tempo. It was, the playing and the improvisation of it was as expansive as the music I was really into. (ibid.)
Coming full circle from his time as an adolescent being inspired to pursue creative music through local performances, Apfelbaum recalls that they recorded the album in Berkeley right across from a performance space that he used to watch AACM artists perform in during the 1970s.

**Stanley Crouch: From Loft Drummer to Neoconservative Strategist**

In the 1980s the musicians of the New Haven cohort and their newly-found New York City collaborators would find themselves at the center of what has been referred to as “the Jazz Wars” (Argue 2008). During this period the rhetoric of Crouch, Albert Murray, Marsalis and other members of what was, at the time referred to as the “neoclassical” (Kart 1986) or “neoconservative” (Palmer 1983, Jackson 2012:30) movement would gain in popularity. The musical aesthetic and view of jazz history that they endorsed would eventually eclipse the momentum that these young composer/improvisers were beginning to generate in the late 1970s and early 80s.

One of the most polarizing figures during this period was Stanley Crouch, who was friends with many of the musicians active in this scene during the loft

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38 The “Jazz Wars” were fought largely by critics and record companies. Many of the musicians profiled in this dissertation found themselves unwittingly caught in the middle of this phenomenon.

39 Critic Nate Chinen characterizes the “neoconservative” musicians and critics that followed in the footsteps of Marsalis, Murray, and Crouch as a movement. He writes that Marsalis’ dual Grammy win helped to launch “a neoconservative jazz movement that yielded not only a decade’s worth of instrumental Young Lions, but also a rallying cry for jazz as ‘America’s Classical Music’” (Chinen 2005:6).
era. During the 1980s, Crouch, along with Wynton Marsalis and Albert Murray began to push an increasingly traditionalist narrative of jazz that ignored many of the factors (hybridization, innovation) crucial to the music’s development. Increasingly, at a time when creative musicians sought to distance themselves from the negative, often racialized connotations of the word “jazz” in writings and interviews, Crouch would use their rhetoric against them to exclude them from the developing canon of influential African American improvisers.

Crouch’s boundary-drawing, theorization of what was and wasn’t “jazz,” and canonization process that was heavily invested in by major power brokers (Lincoln Center, PBS) radically changed the way that jazz history was constructed. For better or worse, jazz was officially declared as “a national treasure” by congressional resolution in 1987 (Jarenwattanamon 2009). While there were always rifts within the jazz and creative music communities about the validity of various musicians’ approaches, there was a tacit understanding that improvisers, by and large, developed their own voices through striving for an original conception. Crouch’s privileging of the maintenance of what he perceived to be an “authentic” jazz tradition over the progressive aspects of the music would have serious consequences.

As George Lewis cogently argues in “Experimentalism In Black and White,” “A signal difference between the pre- and post-Marsalis framings of African American musical tradition, was...that the jazz music now regarded as ‘classical’ was originally the product of innovation, i.e., ‘finding one’s own sound’” (2004a: 85). The proponents of this neoconservative movement in jazz sought to
not only redefine the criteria for what constituted an excellent jazz performance in the 1980s but to rewrite jazz history.

Stanley Crouch championed Wynton Marsalis as the savior of an art form denigrated by fusion and corrupted by influences from “ethnic music” (Crouch 2000). Crouch’s 2000 Jazz Times article sums up his idea of the 1980s, as well as his “heroic” writing style, which positioned young traditionalists as heroes fighting a brave fight against pernicious musical forces attempting to destroy jazz:

Jazz musicians in the ’80s continued the fight against electric rock-fusion, but their music and artistry is often dismissed and the response to these players is often racist. Screwed up in their shallow understanding of politics, jazz critics and musicians—who were equally inept in the arena of thinking—called the music neo-conservative, ‘republican jazz’ and, worst of all, the music of ‘young black men in suits.’ (ibid.)

While Crouch would be celebrated in his role as a jazz critic, he first achieved notoriety in a far different capacity. Representing the ideological extremes of the 1970s and 1980s, Crouch initially gained recognition as part of a Black Arts Movement-era Watts, Los Angeles collective that also included poet Jayne Cortez (Boynton 1995). Indeed, Crouch’s roots in the avant-garde music scene and the larger Black Arts Movement extend back to the 1960s. Crouch also led a band in the early 1970s, Black Music Infinity, that included LA’s top experimentalists. The group included James Newton, Arthur Blythe, Bobby Bradford, and Mark Dresser, many of whom would become influential members of the new music scene that was just then taking root in New York’s lofts. As Gerry Hemingway remembers, Dresser, who spent a few years (1974-1976) in
New Haven after growing up in Southern California, was a link between the New Haven scene and his West Coast compatriots:

He had already developed quite a bit of music of his own from this whole West Coast scene, along with Arthur Blythe and James Newton, and Stanley Crouch, and all these people he had been working with out on the West Coast. So when he was in New Haven he kind of brought that whole zone with him and brought a lot of those people up to play at Yale.  
(Hemingway interview 2014)

James Newton, who lived with Stanley Crouch for a few years in Claremont, a far eastern suburb of Los Angeles, credits Crouch with introducing him to a wide range of musical expression, including many world traditions. Newton recalls:

John Carter came through one weekend and played and that just really messed me up because the register that John was playing in, he was a master of the upper register of the clarinet as everyone knows. So the way that the notes were hitting my body, it was just astounding. And then a few months, David Murray came on the scene. We had a band, and that was basically Black Music Infinity and there would be a lot of guests coming through. Butch Morris came through, a baritone player, (?) Tyler, Butch’s brother Wilbur Morris, so I got to meet a lot of people, and the music that they played in the house was just staggering. ...that was the first time that I heard the music of the forest people of Central Africa. It went from King Oliver to Don Pullen. So all of that had a great impact on David (Murray), Mark (Dresser), and myself... that was Stanley Crouch’s record collection. Even the first time that I heard Debussy’s ‘La Mer,’ I think it was Stanley that played it for me.  (Newton interview 2016)

Upon his 1975 arrival in New York, much of Crouch’s activity was centered around presenting the new sounds of African American experimentalism during a still vibrant loft scene. Although busy as a journalist and series curator, Crouch
himself was also occasionally featured as drummer, making a guest appearance on the *Wildflowers* (1976) sessions alongside Leo Smith’s New Dalta Ahkri, a group which featured Anthony Davis and Pheeroan akLaff. As a critic, Crouch was instrumental in advocating for the newly arrived musicians of the AACM, BAG, and UGMAA, “praising their disciplined approach in contrast to the shortcomings he saw in the New York school of ‘energy music’” (Heller 2016:70). As mentioned in Chapter 1, Crouch wrote the liner notes to Michael Gregory Jackson’s first album, *Clarity* (1977). Jackson recalls that Crouch was close with many of the musicians in the New Haven scene and their collaborators (Jackson interview 2017).

However, beginning in the late 1970s Crouch (1979) would reject the music that many of his former friends and colleagues continued to produce, and begin to fetishize the very qualities that his drumming, by many accounts, lacked: a sense of swing and a strong connection to the jazz tradition. Muhal Richard Abrams compared his drumming to “someone moving furniture” (in Lewis 2008:336). Crouch became highly critical of many of his former circle, including his former Black Music Infinity sideman James Newton, criticizing his trio work with Anthony Davis and Abdul Wadud for its connections to classical music.

By his own account, he was already disillusioned with the rhetoric of the Black Arts Movement and the writing of Amiri Baraka and other prominent theorists of the movement. In a 1995 piece in The New Yorker, Crouch acknowledges his shortcomings as a drummer, blaming his lack of technique on the openness and permissiveness of the avant-garde:
'The problem was that I couldn't really play,' Crouch says. ‘Since I was doing this avant-garde stuff, I didn't have to be all that good, but I was a real knucklehead. If I hadn't been so arrogant and had just spent a couple of years on rudiments, I'd have taken it over, man-no doubt about it.’ (in Boynton 1995)

Anthony Davis also acknowledges the impact that Crouch had from distancing Marsalis from his slightly older “Young Lion” compatriots.

I knew Wynton before, Wynton used to sit in with our band....we were friends in the early days when he first came to New York. When Albert Murray and Stanley [Crouch] got into his head and all that stuff, he became far more rigid, much more judgmental about music. He told me and James [Newton] that when he came to New York he wanted to play with us. (Davis interview 2014)

Describing a relationship that recalls Anthony Davis’ time spent listening to the music of Duke Ellington with Leo Smith (and James Newton’s own experiences with Crouch a decade earlier), Marsalis acknowledges his debt to Crouch:

‘When I was twenty, Crouch brought the Smithsonian collection of Duke Ellington by and said, ‘Man, you ought to listen to Duke,” Marsalis says. ‘I didn't like his stuff, because I had grown up rooted in the nineteen-seventies funk philosophy, listening to Ellington was unheard of. Finally, after a year, I started to like it. But I was intimidated, and told Crouch, “This stuff Duke writes is so complex I could never figure it out,” and Crouch said, “Hey, man, you never know what you can do in ten years.”’ (Boynton 1995)

A brief survey of interviews conducted with Marsalis suggests that he became more conservative in his musical taste as the 1980s progressed. Wynton Marsalis spoke of his music in more maximalist terms in a 1984 interview with Howard Mandel, offering that: “People don’t hear what we’re doing on [Wynton Marsalis
quintet debut album] *Think Of One.* I’m doing things from the ’70s, too, because that’s the era I grew up in. We’re playing funk beats, too. We don’t reclaim music from the ’60s; music is a continuous thing. We’re just trying to play what we hear as the logical extension” (1984:19).

However, by 1987, after the break up of his first quintet, due to his brother Branford and pianist Kenny Kirkland joining Sting’s supergroup, Wynton had allied himself firmly with the “neoclassical” philosophy associated with Albert Murray and Stanley Crouch. Marsalis had begun to trash the dominant maximalist paradigm that developed in the early 1980s (perhaps also taking a shot at his brother’s tenure with Sting in process), stating:

Today we have what I like to call the ‘all music theory,’ which means that one will claim to be able to play a little pop, a little classical, a little reggae, a little Third World music, a little Brazilian, some ragas, even some music called techno that purports to explain sound by machinery. This produces people who claim to like everything...This actually reflects a deep contempt for the hard work and discipline required of artists of any culture to produce high art. (Marsalis in Crouch 1987:18)

Jay Hoggard believes that the increasing embrace of musical conservatism began much earlier, and explicitly ties the popularity of the neo-conservative movement to larger events in American politics:

BUT it tapped into a certain demographic that felt like, ‘Yes we will only have what we think of as jazz and anything else is out of the spectrum.’ That was kind of the turning point, that was in the second year of Reagan, it was like this big shift to the conservative that was weird. (Hoggard interview 2014)

The skills that Crouch learned as a promoter and presenter during the
loft era served him well during this increasingly conservative climate. Through his partnership with Marsalis, Crouch was able to turn this changing climate to his advantage, serving as an artistic consultant at Lincoln Center beginning in 1987, and co-founding the musically conservative Jazz at Lincoln Center program in 1991 (Clark 1994). Crouch, a master hustler, is proud of his ability to navigate the complex political terrain of New York City, describing in detail selling the idea of a new home for Jazz at Lincoln Center to mayor Rudy Giuliani in his collection *Considering Genius* (2006:36).

His writing, while always inspired and sometimes brilliant, contains unorthodox formal features, including an almost page-long parenthetical digression focused around a highly personal attack on saxophonist Frank Wright (1935-1990) (Crouch 2006:30). Fellow *Village Voice* critic Robert Christgau describes his often stream-of-consciousness process: "Stanley is a superb critic, and writes better about the drums than anybody. But sometimes he just faked it. He'd hand in a shiny review and I'd mark it up and he'd rewrite it in forty-five minutes, which is probably longer than he'd spent in the first place" (in Boynton 1995).

Crouch is also a master of bold declarative, often controversial statements. Describing Hoggard's contemporary Steve Nelson (b. 1954), without qualification, as “the lone vibraphonist between Bobby Hutcherson and Stefon Harris” (2006:236), one has to wonder about his objectivity. Crouch also eschews

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40 The main hall of the complex is named after Fredrick P. Rose (1923-1999), a real estate developer and father of Gramavision founder Jonathan F.P. Rose. Jonathan F.P. Rose was also a founding member of Jazz at Lincoln Center (Sharp 2007:278).
journalistic and scholarly convention, providing readers with minimal references. His aesthetic philosophy has similarities to Wadada Leo Smith’s assertion that “the scholar actually pollutes his or her research with tons of footnotes and documents and research and cross polarization” (Smith interview 2015).

Crouch’s bravado and the effusive brilliance of his prose fit perfectly with the anything goes atmosphere of the loft scene; a scene responsible for propelling Crouch onto the national stage. Heller describes this scene, which also applies to much of Crouch’s criticism and creative prose: “both vibrant and messy. Unfettered and undisciplined...soar[ing] toward unexplored heights and crash[ing] headlong into glass ceilings of its own creation” (Heller 2016: 12).

**Signifyin(g)**

Eric Porter eloquently lays out the creation of a specific jazz worldview cultivated by the triumvirate of Wynton Marsalis, Stanley Crouch, and Albert Murray in the 1980s, writing:

Marsalis’s public aesthetic project can be understood, in part, as a rearticulation of Murray’s and Crouch’s rejection of Baraka as interpreter of black music and social theorist. (Porter 2002:277)

Less attention is paid by Porter (and other jazz and creative music scholars) to the significance of the influential school of thought related to jazz and creative music cultivated by Yale-associated scholars and New Haven-based creative musicians. In Chapter 2, I discuss the relationship between Robert Farris Thompson and Leo Smith. Another important Yale connection was between Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Anthony Davis, and other members of the New
Haven scene. Gates, as mentioned in Chapter 2, was mentored by Anthony Davis’ father, Charles T. Davis.

Many commentators have used Gates’ theoretical framework of “Signifyin(g)” to examine African American musical forms (Monson 1994, Walser 1995, Farrah 2007). While Gates’ concept of signification is often cited as a literary theory (Ake 2002:150), his actual point of reference is much larger. Indeed, as Samuel Floyd points out: “the inspiration for Gates's trope of literary intertextuality was African American music” (Floyd 1993: 32).

Gates’ time spent with creative musicians and his associations with scholars that were interested in a wide range of Afro-Diasporic creativity seem to have been of influence on his overall project. His understanding of the multiple layers of signification in Count Basie’s piece “Signify” demonstrates his attention to the importance of pastiche and quotation in creative music. He also recognizes Basie’s playful homage to his musical forebears, a trait found in the music of many of Gates’ musical compatriots in the New Haven scene. Gates writes,

Basie’s composition allows us to see Signifyin(g) as the tradition’s trope of revision as well as of figuration. Throughout the piece, Basie alludes to styles of playing that predominated in black music between 1920 and 1940. These styles include ragtime, stride, barrelhouse, boogie-woogie, and the Kansas City ‘walking bass’ so central to swing in the thirties. Through these allusions, Basie has created a composition characterized by pastiche...Basie, in other words, is repeating the formal history of his tradition within his composition entitled ‘Signify.’ It is this definition of Signify that allows for its use as a metaphor of Afro-American formal revision. (1988:134)

Gates writes in a way that points to his understanding of the subtleties of jazz and creative music in “The Figures of Signification.”
Because the form is self-evident to the musician, both he and his well-trained audience are playing and listening with expectation. Signifyin(g) disappoints these expectations...This form of disappointment creates a dialogue between what the listener expects and what the artist plays. Whereas younger, less mature musicians accentuate the beat, more accomplished musicians do not have to do so. They feel free to imply it. (ibid.123)

While Gates is discussing the music of Charlie Parker, his commentary could just as easily apply to a drummer like Elvin Jones or Rashied Ali, musicians who achieved a similar degree of sophistication in their ability to experiment within form. Anthony Davis’ own aesthetic is reminiscent of Gates’ assertion about musical maturity in African American improvised traditions being demonstrated by subtle and abstract realizations of traditional forms. Davis writes of his collaboration with dancer Molissa Fenley, “In the course of (our) collaboration...I have come to realize that both of us share the quest for an art which both engages the audience on an immediate, visceral level yet delights in the abstract realization of form” (Davis 1983).

Gates’ interest in the concept of Signifyin(g), can be traced to the musical legacy of bebop, with its focus on (often ironic) musical quotation and attendant word-play. Samuel Floyd, defines musical Signifyin(g) as “the transformation of (preexisting) material by using it rhetorically or figuratively-troping, in other words-by trifling with, teasing it, or censuring it in some way” (1991:141). George Lewis also points to the very construction of bebop melodies as an important medium for “signifying” in his essay “Improvised music since 1950,” writing

The musicians often ‘signified on’ the tunes, replacing the melodic line
with another, then naming the new piece in an ironic signifying riff on Tin Pan Alley as well as upon the dominant culture that produced it. Bebop raised the stakes in the game of cultural thrust and parry to a new level of intensity, providing models of both individual and collective creativity that were adopted and extended during later periods in improvised music.

(1996: 219)

The musicians of the bebop era, who were master signifiers, would continue the practice into the 1960s, using quotation and referentiality in ever more subtle ways. Charles Mingus, a hero to Anthony Davis (who saw him perform at Yale) and James Newton, was one of the master signifiers. His piece “Parkeriana” signified on Parker’s musical legacy by creating a piece out of as many stream-of-consciousness references to Parker’s music as his band mates could muster. It was the ultimate postmodern exercise in the 1960s, an era associated in many jazz histories more with the earnestness of John Coltrane’s spiritual explorations and soul jazz.

Additionally, Gates’ writing and theorization, especially its focus on transformations of Esu-Elegbara, the Yoruba trickster figure, into a new world context in The Signifyin’ Monkey (1988) would become an important part of the repertoire of the circle around him. A few years before publishing that influential book, Gates would explore similar themes in the liner notes to Davis’ album Hemispheres (1983). His influence can also be felt in passages from fellow Yale graduate George Lewis, who writes of Anthony Braxton in A Power Stronger Than Itself, “Braxton was putting his contract to good use in ways that recalled the Yoruba image of the trickster” (2008:339).

Lewis explains in the liner notes to Anthony Davis’ Notes From the
*Underground* (2014) how Davis’ music continues to be influenced by the Yoruba mythology that he investigated alongside Gates, writing: “Moreover, at around the same moment, both Davis and his longtime friend, literary theorist and cultural historian Henry Louis Gates, were developing approaches to African American expressive culture that connected W.E.B. Du Bois’s influential concept of double consciousness with the Yoruba god Esu-Elegbara, a classic trickster figure who appears as a key element in Gates’s classic 1988 book, *The Signifying Monkey*” (Lewis 2014).

Robert O’Meally, the editor of *Uptown Conversation* (2004), an important document of “The New Jazz Studies,” a movement that I discuss in the next chapter, uses both Gates and Thompson to theorize Louis Armstrong as another, quite different type of trickster figure. O’Meally writes, “This is an American process of creating art through a dynamic system of exchange—including what Henry Louis Gates terms “signifyin(g)” and what Robert Farris Thompson terms “dances of derisions”—that often comes with a coolly aloof but calculated smile. Armstrong’s smile, then, as a heap of signifying, in the African American way: an Armstrongian dance of derision” (2004:282).

Gates also convened a panel at Harvard addressing Ken Burns’ 2001 *Jazz* documentary, reuniting Stanley Crouch with a panel containing members of the New Haven scene, including Jay Hoggard, Anthony Davis, Pheeroan akLaff, as well as Harvard Professor Ingrid Monson. The panel allowed these composer/improvisers to respond directly to Burns and Crouch’s lack of representation afforded to their cohort, and the 1970s and 80s in general. akLaff
recalls a spirited debate between the New Haven cohort and their former loft compatriot that touched on many of the issues of representation addressed by scholars active within the New Jazz Studies.

**Episteme**

Anthony Davis’ ensemble Episteme would develop a highly original signature approach to music making, prompting Howard Mandel to write that: “Davis’ painstakingly detailed compositions for Episteme have become an idiom of their own, too, rewarding rapt attention” (Mandel 1987). One of the most striking examples of this powerful ensemble realizing Davis’ singular vision is *Hemispheres*, recorded in 1983.

*Hemispheres* (1983) is not only a significant musical statement, but it is also a document of a particular understanding of Afro-diasporic art and music. The song titles on *Hemispheres* reference Yoruba deities and suggest ties between traditional Yoruba mythology and contemporary African American culture. In his liner notes Henry Louis Gates describes the significance of Esu-Elegbara, the Yoruba deity and trickster figure, and his various New World incarnations. As Gates writes, “The New World figurations of this deity speak eloquently of the unbroken arc of metaphysical presuppositions and patterns of representation shared through time and space among black cultures in West Africa, South America, the Caribbean, and in the United States” (Gates 1983).

The music on *Hemispheres* is a mature statement by Davis that is in many
ways the sonic counterpart to Gates’ transformative and oft-cited masterpiece. No track illustrates this better than “Little Richard’s New Wave,” which takes Little Richard’s signature 8th note piano ostinato and refracts it through his own original rhythmic and harmonic concept. Anchored by Pheeroan akLaff’s propulsive, deeply funky drumming, “Little Richard’s New Wave” reminds the listener that rock n’ roll, and by extension its contemporary manifestation “new wave,” was originally the product of black creativity. Placed alongside other pieces that reference Yoruba mythology, it is a powerful statement that is an excellent example of borrowing older forms to create new musical developments, and places Davis as the latest in a long line of Afro-diasporic creativity.

*Hemispheres* is also the only record of Davis’ from this period to feature his former bandleader and mentor, Wadada Leo Smith. Smith is featured as a soloist on the final piece, a version of Davis’ “Clonetics,” and it is fascinating to hear in this context, performing against such a highly rhythmic background. As Davis explains in the liner notes, the piece utilizes “phrases of 30, 25, and 60 beats...allowing for more variation in the infrastructure of the repeating rhythms” (Davis 1983). Smith takes full advantage of the range of his expressive extended techniques. He starts out at the top of his range, and plays the same figure going up to a high Eb three times.\(^{41}\) After further exploration by Smith, J.D. Parran then joins in on clarinet in the upper range. Following their exchange, David Samuels begins soloing and George Lewis begins improvising using his written part as

\(^{41}\) This is possibly influenced by his love of Miles Davis’ playing on *Bitches Brew*. At a recent talk at NYC’s the Stone, Smith cites the importance of Davis’ high note playing on the intro to the studio version as an important and unique moment in creative music (W.L. Smith 2015b).
motivic inspiration. Parran and Lewis settle on a chord together and the rest of the band comes in with the cluster that began the piece.

The music itself is a development of ideas and strategies that Davis began working on with his group Episteme on their self-titled Gramavision release from 1981. Davis uses the overlapping rhythmic cycles that were informed by his studies of Carnatic music, love of gamelan music, and Steve Reich’s minimalism. As mentioned earlier, Davis was friends with many of the musicians in Reich’s group, and Davis’ Episteme records feature Reich’s violinist Shem Guibbory. While Davis is interested in ideas drawn from the minimalist movement associated with Reich, his approach is quite different. Although Davis acknowledges Reich’s influence, he has never agreed with Reich and other minimalists on their dogmatic adherence to certain aesthetic principles. Davis recounts that he and Reich had a falling out over the expressive vocal timbre that Davis’ singers used in his operas, Davis recalls:

I wanted that. I like the emotionality of the voice, the vibrato, all that stuff. I mean, Steve Reich couldn’t stand it. He was appalled that I would use that vocal quality...There’s a kind of tradition behind that that I was interested in. Especially, among black singers, like from Leontyne Price to Leona Mitchell to Priscilla Baskerville, there’s that kind of soprano sound. (Davis interviewed by Van Cleve 1993:14)

As Elise Kuhl Kirk points out, Davis begins to lay out his new aesthetic orientation in the liner notes to 1979’s Lady of the Mirrors, writing “I feel that I am part of a new revolution of art which turns away from the minimalistic of the small idea to the concept of a large, more fertile imaginative universe” (2005: 352).
“Experimental Hybrids”

The 1980s were also an era when the relationship between Western art music and jazz was being reevaluated. As George Lewis writes of the era, “Up to this point the most unusual aspect of the debate over borders between classical music and jazz was that its most publicly prominent conceptual leadership came from the black experimental community” (Lewis 2004a:85). Lewis is, ostensibly, speaking about composers associated with the AACM and other collectives, writing that the Third Stream composers did not create or support a music that that was “strongly insistent upon the inclusion of the black vernacular, including the imperative of improvisation” (ibid:73). However, even in the 1950s and 60s, many of the most important third stream-associated composers were African American (John Lewis, Charles Mingus and George Russell), or Euro-American composers that had a strong background in African American improvised traditions (Gil Evans, Jimmy Giuffre) (Heining 2010:122). Before the appearance of Wynton Marsalis in the jazz and classical music world, many conversations around the interpenetration of jazz and Western art music in the 1970s focused on the music of members of the AACM and younger musicians who followed in their footsteps, such as Anthony Davis and James Newton.

For the majority of these musicians, their approach was marked by an increasing blurring of the lines between composition and improvisation. Anthony Davis articulates his project of combining improvisation and composition in relation to his suite Undine: “I’m really interested in the seamless interplay of the
two elements. To me this is the most successful record so far if you can’t tell the difference between the two” (in Strickland 1991:79). As I have noted, many of the other experimentalists of the AACM, BAG, UGMAA and their CMS and New Haven acolytes were also incorporating new approaches to improvisation, extended techniques on their instruments, and the influence of a wide variety of world traditions.

By and large, the engagement with the classical orchestra by composers of the New Haven school and artists associated with BAG, AACM, and UGMAA was focused around collaborations that would allow improvisers into orchestral settings. One important set of concerts that premiered a few works by composers interested in large-scale pieces that merged improvisation and composition was during a “Meet the Moderns” series presented at Lower Manhattan’s Cooper Union on April 21, and Brooklyn Academy of Music on April 22, 1983. The announcement in *Down Beat* reads: “The Brooklyn Philharmonic under the baton of Lukas Foss, will be playing works by Anthony Davis, Oliver Lake, Ron Carter, and Leroy Jenkins (Concerto for Improvised Violin And Chamber Orchestra) as part of their ‘Meet the Moderns’ series, with the composers performing with the orchestra” (“Big City Beat: New York” 1983:12).

The participation of Lukas Foss is significant for many reasons. Foss (who studied at Yale with Paul Hindemith from 1939-40) (Kingsbury date) is acknowledged as a pioneer of bringing improvisation into contemporary classical music. However, his conception of the relationship between improvisation and composition was much different than the artists of the AACM and the New Haven
scene. In an article written two decades earlier entitled “Composition versus Improvisation” Foss writes: “Recently there have been efforts at blurring the dividing line between composition and improvisation. I would rather emphasize it. In our concerts I like to present the composed and the improvised side by side (but not mixed)” (1962:684). While Foss may have had a different approach to incorporating composition and improvisation, the collaboration itself did mark an important milestone in merging improvisation and composition and bringing improvisers into a traditional orchestral setting.

In many ways this 1983 concert, and others like it, was the manifestation of a truly revolutionary idea that challenged the hegemony of western art music and musicians. Henry Threadgill, another New York-based AACM artist whose music continues to challenge boundaries, states that, ultimately, the improvisatory character of his music and the music of his colleagues and collaborators is what makes it unique. He believes that this aspect of the music makes it fundamentally different in character even from the music of other African American composers who incorporated Afro-diasporic elements into their concert music.

Somebody might have heard the name of William Grant Still or Ulysses Kay, but not really. But something that has happened in my time that never existed before: All of the composers know people like me and Anthony Braxton and Muhal Richard Abrams. Grant Still or Kay, they tried to make their music fit into that European model. And when I get a commission, they still make it fit into that European container, in order to get it played. This has been going on for a long time. But now, I don’t want any more commissions from American orchestras that are not ready to do what I want to do and go in the direction I’m going in...and learn something. Because we don’t process music the way they process music,
either. We process music -- when I say ‘we,’ I mean improvising musicians; not all of them, but myself -- I approach it through the word the Germans use for rehearsing: probe, which is in search of. Not to read something straight through and go in like, well, everybody read it and everybody pay the permit to get up and go home. (Threadgill in Iverson 2011)

The concept of a new American music combining influences from classical composition with improvisation was also clearly articulated much earlier in Leo Smith’s 1974 article “M1:American Music.”

I suggest that the laws and aesthetic principles of creative music, its technique of improvisation, theory of harmony, melodic inventions, concepts of free-rhythm and aesthetic sense should be thoroughly brought together with the most positive discoveries that have been found in the classical music of America. The creative result of this coming together would provide the element contents and aesthetic for a music equally participated in by all—an American music. (L. Smith 1974:111)

Smith and his acolytes would make significant strides towards realizing this vision in the 1980s. In 1982 Anthony Davis wrote a landmark piece for orchestra, an adaptation of a piece that he originally composed for his trio with James Newton and Abdul Wadud. One of the ideas that Davis had begun working on during this period was the incorporation of musicians who were familiar with his own personal musical language, particularly the rhythmic aspects, into an orchestra. Through finding innovative approaches to integrating himself and his trio of improvisers into the orchestra, and blurring the lines between composition and improvisation he was able to make the orchestra “sound like his band,” one of his chief concerns in many of his orchestral pieces.

I did an orchestra version [of ‘Still Waters’] that was basically a concerto
grosso for me, James Newton, and Abdul [Wadud] . . . I played it with the New York Philharmonic and the Brooklyn Philharmonic . . . I was trying to write an orchestra piece but after that I thought ‘hmm, how do I make it more like...how can I pretend that the orchestra’s my band?’ It’s just going to become my band. That’s the only way that it’s going to work that I think it’s gonna be really happening. I was very excited to make it so that it didn’t sound like an orchestra but it sounds like my band. (Davis interview 2014)

Anthony Davis locates the inspiration for his rewrites and adaptations of existing material to his father Charles T. Davis’ creative literary work, stating:

I love the idea of taking something I have and developing it. To me it’s about developing a language, building upon the past, my past, my own personal language and means of expression. It’s its own world, communicating with yourself and taking things and transforming them into a landscape. I guess I maybe got this from my father, who was a literary critic who would do that with Edwin Arlington Robinson or Walt Whitman revisions. (in Strickland 1991:80)

James Newton recalls that the performance of “Still Waters” with the New York Philharmonic was an important victory for Davis, Newton, and Wadud. Newton relates that when he heard the orchestral players asking Wadud about fingerings and bowings that he knew they had the musicians of the NY Phil on board (Newton interview 2016a). Newton recalls how their music was well received by both improvisers and classical musicians:

I remember a concert that we gave in Basel, Switzerland and it was packed. That ensemble drew as many improvising, creative musicians and classical musicians. It drew both because we had this chamber music sound, and it was! The level of the music just, utterly, it just stunned the audience, the whole time. It was just like one of those nights where everything is clicking.
And who was playing the cello better than Wadud? And as I mentioned, when we played with the New York Phil, they knew that there were three master musicians up in front of them that understood their language and had a whole other language and world that they could operate in, within their world! And that’s what Anthony put together! (Newton interview 2016a)

It is instructive to compare Newton’s positive account of working with the New York Philharmonic with their infamous performance of John Cage’s “Atlas Eclipticalis.” Piekut, in his examination of the orchestra’s performance of Cage’s piece writes that, “The story of a well-intentioned experimentalist encountering a curmudgeonly old institution has also proven irresistible for musicians sympathetic to Cage, as well as to his critical commentators” (Piekut 2011:22). He ultimately deconstructs the legend and provides a richer picture of the encounter through interviews with the musicians involved and archival research. Piekut concludes that despite Cage’s professed anarchism, because of “the threat of violence being used to guarantee an enactment of tolerance,” that “the situation reproduced and in fact closely modeled the lineaments of hegemonic liberalism in the twentieth century” (64).

In other words, although Cage’s rhetoric painted the situation as one where Cage was victimized by the New York Phil, who were, in his words like “gangsters” and “vandals” (Piekut 2011:22), the very nature of the concert placed Cage in a hierarchical position to dominate the orchestra. In contrast to Cage’s unwillingness to meet the orchestra halfway by writing a piece that would highlight the orchestral musicians’ traditional musicality, Davis’ piece “Still Waters” attempted to play to the strengths of the orchestral musicians as well as
the improvisers of Davis’ trio.

“Atlas Eclipticalis” would become important for “establishing Cage’s bona fides as a radical avant-garde artist” (Piekut 2011: 22) largely because of the conflicts between Cage and the orchestra. However, Davis’ successful performance would become a major accomplishment for the three composer/improvisers because of how well they worked with the orchestra. In a 1984 interview Davis advocates for reaching outside of his sometimes-insular jazz and creative music community:

Ellington and Mingus are very important in the tradition of what I’m writing, but I have also studied Stravinsky, Messiaen and Takemitsu. What’s so heinous about European influences? I think now there’s an idea of finding common sensibilities rather than sticking to your own little community.42 (in Pareles 1984)

While the trio of Davis, Newton, and Wadud were operating with a different musical philosophy in many respects than the members of the New York Phil, their project was built on a mutual respect of traditional musical virtuosity.43 The ability to successfully achieve a balance between Davis’ aesthetic and the NY Phil’s sensibilities was a major achievement that required Davis, Newton, and Wadud to surmount impressive logistical and cultural challenges. However, for its lack of sensationalism, it would never receive the legendary status of Cage’s encounter. Although the orchestra was still obligated to play his music, Davis’

42 James Newton echoes this sentiment in a recent interview, recalling his excitement when Takemitsu claimed Ellington as one of his important influences (Iverson 2017).

43 Wadud had extensive orchestral experience, working regularly with the Brooklyn Philharmonic and other orchestras under his birth name, Ron DeVaughn (Wanek and Reid 2014).
willingness to deal with the orchestra on its own terms (in contrast with Cage’s desire to subvert their traditional musical virtuosity) is testament to the philosophy of collaboration that he had internalized as a young composer/improviser active in New Haven and CMS.

X

One of the most important works of the 1980s was Anthony Davis’ opera X, *The Life and Times of Malcolm X*, which was given its New York premiere at the City Opera in 1986 (Davis interviewed by Van Cleve 1993:9). Davis’ opera was not only a great musical achievement, but was also important in promoting Malcolm X’s legacy as a cultural hero. Nelson George includes it as a significant event in his *Chronicle of Post-Soul Black Culture* (1992), writing that the opera was “an important moment in the mythologizing of Malcolm’s legacy” (1992:28).

The music for the opera, for the most part, was an extension of the layered rhythmic concept that Davis had been working on with his ensemble Episteme since *Variations in Dreamtime* (1982), recorded in 1980. Many of the pieces in the opera are elaborations of pieces that Davis originally recorded on *Hemispheres*, re-contextualized for the opera. While much of the music is in the same vein as his small group music, Davis was able to incorporate a much wider palette of generic expression into the larger operatic form.

The opera was well attended and generally received positive reviews in jazz publications. Howard Mandel writes in *Down Beat* of its opening: “But it’s Anthony Davis himself who deserves greatest kudos for his accomplishment,
which may be recorded by spring, and should be attempted by other opera companies looking for valid modern work, as a test of its place in the enduring repertoire” (1987:50). However, reviewers outside of the jazz and creative music community were less enthusiastic about its reception, with a *New York Times* reviewer writing:

> Mr. Davis’s score is an amalgam of contemporary atonality, repetitive chant and what sounded to these untutored ears like modern jazz. Except for the jazzy outbreaks, such as the lively Harlem interlude of Act II, vocalism generally alternates in style between monotonous chanting and the kind of spiky, keyless line that no human voice outside contemporary opera has been known to sing. (Henahan 1986:1)

The disparity in enthusiasm between jazz-associated reviewers and reviewers whose primary background is in Western art music can be attributed to the difficulty that black artists, especially from a jazz background, have had in gaining acceptance from and being taken seriously by the mainstream classical music establishment.

Davis speaks to the difference in treatment between African American composers (especially associated with jazz and creative music) and European American composers in relation to a proposed “community engagement” strategy that would have him present the opera in playgrounds in the community instead of the concert hall. Davis recounts that: “the whole idea was basically a kind of apartheid approach that we have in America. The idea that we look at our art by white artists as something that can be presented in a concert hall or an opera house—the whole high art/low art distinction that we make” (in Strickland 1991:76).
In another interview, Davis speaks to the controversial nature of the production, suggesting that the subject matter limited its ability to gain a level of funding that would allow it to be performed more frequently after its initial run.

In New York, everything gets jaded and polarized. There was a definite problem with that. We face that problem often. A lot of the problems of getting performances of X were due to fund-raising. We had a lot of support from the NEA and Opera America. And there were some producers who were interested, but some of the foundations that were more conservatively based—they had serious trouble with the subject matter. And I think that’s lost sometimes. For example, there were articles about Nixon in China and how that went around and why didn’t X. They tried to say that it was a musical reason, and I know it wasn’t. Because I know that it was mostly because of the subject. X is far more inflammatory. (Davis interviewed by Van Cleve 1993:10)

Davis also speaks to the transgressive nature of bringing improvisers and black experimentalists into an institution that was overwhelmingly white in the 1980s (and still is), something that he had been interested in since beginning to write for classical orchestra.

It’s sort of guerrilla tactics on my part. I can never forget looking at the City Opera orchestra and all of a sudden, there was Ray Anderson, sitting as lead trombone player and J.D. Parran as lead clarinet player. I mean, there were some radical things. This is an orchestra that wasn’t even integrated...I forced integration on the orchestra. All of a sudden they had seven or eight black performers inside the orchestra. There was a lot of resentment. I remember the brass section was mad because the trumpet player played so loud, and they wanted to wear earplugs. The trombone player...there was all this friction. For my players, they were very upset because they didn’t like the vibe of that, and I had to deal with it on their side. But I also think, in a way, it was kind of healthy that we had to work
it out and do the performances. And they were successful. But then a lot of aesthetic issues were raised, a lot of things that I think it’s important to continue. (Davis interviewed by Van Cleve 1993:11)

The opera drew from many different musical traditions, using Davis’ concept of “rhythm drama” and distinctive pan-tonal harmonic approach. Davis had many stated goals in writing the music and one of these, importantly, was to create an “American Islamic music,” that was based on the music of John Coltrane, McCoy Tyner (who had converted to Islam) and other affiliated artists whose music embraced a spirituality that became the soundtrack for various Afrocentric movements from the mid 1960s on. Davis explains:

I had this idea, when all the church members were coming...I had to be careful because I had to avoid Baptist clichés. I wanted to avoid the gospel tradition in its entirety. There’s nothing gospel in X at all. Period. And part of that is intentional because, in a way, I’m inventing an American Islamic music that’s based in Coltrane. Because Coltrane, to me, is probably the leading exponent of--in ‘Love Supreme’--was kind of devotional, of Islamic music, of Black Islam, of Islam in America. So I was interested in that as sort of a launching pad for some of the things. (Davis interviewed by Van Cleve 1993:13)

While the concept may sound counterintuitive, especially because instrumental and secular music is forbidden in many Islamic societies and Coltrane had deep roots in the Christian church, it appears that Davis wanted to create a music that conjured the cultural milieu of the many African American converts to Islam in the 1950s and 1960s.

The spiritual impact of John Coltrane’s later music and posthumous association with Malcolm X and the civil rights era made Coltrane a logical
starting point for Davis. As Scott Saul points out “Amiri Baraka later praised Coltrane as ‘Malcolm X in Super Bop Fire.’ The ‘Malcolm poem’ was the counterpart of the ‘Coltrane poem,’ in the Black Arts Movement, with both figures called upon posthumously” (Saul 2011:261). Associations between John Coltrane’s music and Malcolm X’s message continue to resonate to this day. In a 2015 interview with Billboard magazine, saxophonist/composer Kamasi Washington relates how he connects the music of middle and late period Coltrane with that time period of the civil rights era.

That intense, 1960s jazz that people always associate with John Coltrane. That’s what we were trying to get, because it felt like that, it felt like that time period when he came in, his energy. It just felt like the height of civil rights. (in Weiner 2015a)

Bringing aspects of 1960s spirituality in jazz into Davis’ own idiosyncratic concept would ensure that the opera contained a wide range of musical material. This idea would also give him a vehicle to deal with the music of late-period Coltrane and his acolytes in relation to his own compositional practice in a relatively direct way. Although one of his formative experiences was playing in Rashied Ali’s group, Davis had never incorporated the style of Coltrane’s late and middle period music into his own concept in such a literal manner on any of his recordings. In many ways the programmatic nature of the music allowed Davis to incorporate the ideas of his heroes and predecessors into his own musical world in a very direct way.

One of the best examples of Davis’ channeling of John Coltrane in an attempt

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44 George Lewis does, however, cite a suite that Davis wrote for John Coltrane in the repertoire of Advent (in B. Smith 1977:4).
to create an “American Islamic music” is “Allahu-Akbar,” a movement that first appears at the end of “Malcolm, Who Have You Been?” that features the choir singing “Allahu-Akbar” (Allah is the greatest) as a repetitive chant, reminiscent of “A Love Supreme.” The track also features John Purcell on soprano sax playing pentatonic phrases over the full group. For this track, pianist Marilyn Crispell abandons complex atonal harmonies in favor of simple quartal harmonization reminiscent of McCoy Tyner’s 1970s music.

In contrast to the more traditional orchestral writing in pieces like “Overture” where each section has intricate parts interacting with one another, the writing in “Allahu-Akbar” uses the orchestra mainly to give weight to the chanted chorus, with the low brass unisons giving the orchestration the flavor of Coltrane’s Africa Brass sessions. Once the singing finishes, the only instruments left are J.D. Parran on tenor saxophone, backed by the trio of Marilyn Crispell, Mark Dresser, and akLaff channeling Coltrane’s quartet. Parran launches into a late-Coltrane inspired solo that ends with a loud cluster from the ensemble playing with wide vibrato, also channeling the music of late Coltrane and Albert Ayler. The piece gives akLaff full reign to engage in dialogue with other improvisers instead of merely supporting the orchestra.

In contrast to “Allahu-Akbar,” “As Salaam Alaikum” is based on the 11/4 ostinato that appears at the end of “Little Richard’s New Wave” (with a considerable amount of development towards the end of the movement) with Pheeroan akLaff and the full rhythm section providing accompaniment to the orchestra in the same vein as the original. Davis speaks to his use of motifs from
earlier pieces as well as his desire for the vocals to sound as natural and grooving as possible:

to me, the [motifs] are characters. I have a rhythmic idea, like a 25 beat pattern. [Sings pattern.] What it is, it’s 4+3, 4+6, 4+4. But then, it also goes to 25, I can use a 25 beat thing against that...so in X, when I bring that in in X ...I have these male voices on top of it. What’s the key for me is, what I’ve learned from Pheeroan, Pheeroan always makes every groove feel because on some level he’s always playing 4. He’s just playing. Then when I wrote my vocal writing, I would pretend I was in four. Just write this thing, so I would have this thing that was playing against this rhythmic structure, yet it was still organic, it felt together with what they’re doing. (Davis interview 2014)

Another track, “America is A House of Glass,” also draws on the 11/4 ostinato from the end of “Little Richard’s New Wave,” originally recorded on Hemispheres (1983), scored for the full orchestra. The beginning features only the orchestra without the Episteme rhythm section. Instead of playing metric time, akLaff reinforces the vocal part.

In addition to incorporating the music influenced by John Coltrane, Davis took the opportunity to write music that drew in less abstract ways from another one of his heroes, Duke Ellington. Davis would continue to incorporate the influence of Ellington and Mingus in his subsequent operas and notated works, especially in the theme from his 1992 opera Tania. The section “Pool Hall,” from X is heavily indebted to the influence of Ellington and the music of the swing era more generally, but still makes use of Davis’ unique intervallic writing and interruptions of more complex rhythmic structures. The rubato middle-section is an intriguing mixture between Davis’ polytonal clusters and the harmonic
language of Charles Mingus.

Davis recalls that he felt completely free while writing X to bring in the totality of his musical influences and knowledge:

In a way, when I was writing X, I felt a tremendous freedom, as if I wrote as though there were no barriers in music. As if, the ideal that the orchestra could go into a swing groove and then into a 5/4 poly-metric dance. Effortless. You know, just do it. And that I could use drums and yet have all kinds of textures with the voice. (Davis interviewed by Van Cleve 1993:12)

While X was a major musical and cultural achievement, Davis feels that it could have been much more successful. As he recalls,

in ‘86 we did X at the City Opera, New York City Opera. That was a big moment for me. It was a great moment. I remember the opening--it was just really thrilling to be there and see every seat was sold and a 50% black house in Lincoln Center, which is really unusual...All the performances were sold out. It was really a big success in a sense, also. But I think it was a lost opportunity in terms of the opera world because they could have sold out ten more performances. But it hasn’t even been revived again. And I think part of it that they were uncomfortable with the new audience. They always give lip service to new audiences--interest in bringing in audiences. Then when you actually do it, they are scared that their friends aren’t there. (Davis interview ibid:9)

X would also mark Davis’ final record on Gramavision. The late 80s and 1990s would see an increasing conservatism in the jazz community and a marginalization of many of the creative musicians who thrived during the early 1980s.

The 1980s was a turbulent decade for creative music. This was an era when the New Haven musicians and young musicians who attended
CMS were able to develop new approaches to music and achieve a greater degree of visibility for their experimental approaches. While many of the New Haven and CMS musicians achieved great musical success, these developments were ultimately overshadowed by the neoconservative movement. Many of the developments of that period have been neglected by mainstream jazz histories, and the hybrid musics that these musicians created, which at the time seemed destined to revolutionize jazz and creative music, have been, in many cases, all but forgotten. Consequently, the late 1980s and 1990s would be a difficult period commercially for many of the experimentalists whose careers had gained considerable momentum in the late 1970s and early 80s.
By the early 1990s, with the Young Lion trend in full swing, the dominant paradigm in the jazz and creative music scene had changed considerably since the early 1980s. Although the neo-traditional jazz represented by this movement was far from the only game in town in New York, as evidenced by the strength of the Downtown II scene and the M-BASE collective, for example (Dessen 2003), it became a dominant force in terms of marketing and funding. Pheeroan akLaff tells how the scene had changed for him and contemporaries since the 1980s.

Around the early ’90s I organized a little trio with Ed Cherry and Andy McKee and we were playing something that I thought would maybe fit both worlds, and I got an appointment with an AR guy who I knew. I walk in the door and I sit down, he says, ‘So Pheeroan, you know I can’t get you a record deal, right?’ And I’m like, ‘That’s a good way to start out the meeting.’ Just let me know in the beginning that they’ve already told me, ‘I may have a meeting with you, but...’ It was at that point that I knew that I had been blacklisted. I knew that not only had it changed, but that I represented something that somebody somewhere or several somebodies were saying, ‘No, no, no, none of that.’ (akLaff interview 2016)

Although this is akLaff’s personal story, it is indicative of the shift that occurred in the music industry during the Young Lion era of the late 80s and 90s, where because of either age, politics, or aesthetic orientation, many creative musicians, including ones whose music was relatively accessible, became persona non grata in the music industry. Henry Threadgill’s short tenure at Columbia Records notwithstanding, many of the important voices in creative music that this
dissertation focuses on lost the support of the major or mid-level labels that they had previously recorded for.

In many ways, the 1990s were an era that was defined by an increasing musical conservatism in the jazz world, and a lack of acceptance for projects that crossed between musical worlds. Tellingly, *Down Beat*, the magazine of record for jazz and creative music, would change their slogan from “The Contemporary Music Magazine” (late 70s, early 80s) and “For Contemporary Musicians” (mid 80s)” to “Jazz, Blues, and Beyond,” which recalled their pre-1973 slogan of “Jazz, Blues, and Rock.” Gone were the cover stories on Stockhausen and Cage, and the kind of eclecticism in which any given issue might feature Stockhausen, Miles Davis, or even King Sunny Ade. Economically, the advances that James Newton and veterans of the loft scene in the 1980s fought so hard to protect were reversed by a new generation of musicians eager to move to New York and secure recording contracts in the wake of the burgeoning “Young Lion” phenomenon.

In this chapter I examine the impact of musicians associated with the New Haven and CMS scenes on the present day creative music scene (primarily in New York). I explore the contemporary activities of New Haven and CMS associated artists active as improvisers, composers and pedagogues. I also examine the continued intercultural collaborations that these artists have participated in and the contribution of these composer/improvisers and their students to the New Jazz Studies. I go on to focus on creative large ensembles in the 2010s and compare and contrast the approaches between two large ensemble initiatives, the JCOI (George Lewis, Anthony Davis, James Newton, etc.) and the
Tri-Centric Orchestra (Anthony Braxton), which seek to bring improvisation and creative music concepts into an orchestral setting in different ways. Returning to New Haven, I look at the contemporary state of creative music-making there, and the reunion of Wadada Leo Smith with Pheeroan akLaff and Anthony Davis in Smith’s ensemble, the Golden Quartet. To conclude the chapter, I compare three contemporary projects of saxophonists, including Kamasi Washington, who have engaged in the kind of musical education and formation that I describe in this dissertation.

**A Changing Economic Climate**

Gramavision records would continue to operate into the 1990s, but at only a fraction of their former output, finally issuing Anthony Davis’ opera *X, The Life and Times of Malcolm X* (1992) 6 years after its premiere. The opera was released as a three CD set complete with the libretto, ostensibly in the wake of the interest in the subject matter that Spike Lee’s well-received 1992 biopic generated. Although they would continue to release music into the 1990s (including some of Medeski, Martin, and Wood’s classic early records), Gramavision Records would be acquired by Rhino in the early 1990s and eventually cease to exist. Arista’s Novus label, which issued many important works by AACM musicians including Braxton, Muhal Richard Abrams, and Henry Threadgill, would continue as RCA Novus.45 Like the many other labels

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45 Abrams and Threadgill, as mentioned in Chapter 1, were Wadada Leo Smith’s partners in TMS records, an unrealized AACM project which Smith continued by himself as Kabell records.
that had previously featured more adventurous artists, RCA Novus jumped on the Young Lion bandwagon in the early 90s, issuing Roy Hargrove’s earliest albums, before closing in the mid-1990s.

**Creative Music in Higher Education**

The ‘90s were a difficult period in terms of media attention and record sales for many of the musicians in my ethnography of the creative music scene. However, many of these composer/improvisers entered academia in some form, eventually exerting a considerable influence on the creative music scene through their mentorship of generations of composer/improvisers and scholars. During the 1990s, Wadada Leo Smith, Anthony Braxton, and George Lewis would all acquire prominent teaching positions at major universities. The conceptually advanced nature of their music, in many cases dismissed as being overly “academic” by the jazz press, would help them acquire positions that put them in place to nurture the next generation of creative musicians. Through their philosophical and musical leadership, they molded the minds of some of the most important scholars and musicians of the current generation. Taylor Ho Bynum (b. 1975), a student of Anthony Braxton, describes the situation, citing his mentor Bill Dixon, who taught as Professor of Music at Bennington College in Vermont from 1968 to 1996 (Allen 2009).

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46 Smith at CalArts, Braxton at Wesleyan, Lewis at UCSD and later Columbia  
47 In addition to Dixon’s tenure at Bennington, Cecil Taylor taught his own music as Artist in Residence at Wisconsin in 1971. In an interview about his position he states that: “My purpose...is to carry on the tradition of Fletcher Henderson and Duke Ellington and therefore to reaffirm and extend the line of
Their only economic option was to go to institutions, and then it became kind of eliticized, because the only people that could find work, the Anthony Braxtons and the Leo Smiths, and the Bill Dixons, and the Cecil Taylors even, all went to sort of the small, elite liberal arts schools to teach. So the music moved to the academy in a much different way, so I think there was that first generation. For the first time, elite institutions of higher education were open to bringing in those practitioners. (Bynum interview 2016)

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Braxton, one of the most celebrated musicians and composers of the 1970s, describes living in “extreme poverty” during the 1980s in between his time at Arista records and his professorship at Mills College (Lock 1988:3). Like akLaff, Bynum speaks of the difficulty that many creative musicians who led active careers in the late 1970s and 80s began to face during this time period,

there was a real lack of work for creative music and creative musicians in the late 80s and 90s. A real lack of work, not because they weren’t interested in working necessarily, but because the opportunities had dried up or had been consolidated to a more conservative aesthetic. (Bynum interview 2016)

Bynum attributes this lack of work to a paradigm shift in the jazz and creative music community. A shift wherein public funding for the arts began to collapse while the neoconservative movement began to attract more and more funding and increased visibility, eventually becoming a major institutionalized force through Jazz at Lincoln Center and other organizations.

The pressure on the arts scene during that era was profound and within black music that goes back thousands of years” (Levin 1971).
the creative music community that the whole neo-conservative jazz renaissance really put pressure on what work was available anymore. Festivals that used to have more open-minded booking policies started getting more conservative. The artistic field in general got much more conservative, as the culture did. (Bynum interview 2016)

Both Braxton and Smith, at Wesleyan and CalArts, respectively, began their programs in the early 1990s, after a brief tenure at Mills College (Braxton) and Bard College (Smith) in the mid 1980s. This was an era when jazz and creative music education was beginning to expand all over the country. For example, the New School in New York began their jazz program in 1986, and UCLA added a jazz studies undergrad degree in 1996 (“History-The New School,” “History of the Department”-UCLA Ethnomusicology). Both Wesleyan and CalArts, with distinguished histories in experimental and world musics, seemed like natural fits for these conceptualists, whose wide-ranging interests included studying music from around the world, and collaborating with musicians of all backgrounds.

Mainstream jazz education, especially at the college level, has had by many accounts a homogenizing effect on the music. However, the programs of Smith and Braxton, with a focus on their own iconoclastic, well-developed systems, have become an inspiration for some of the most interesting and critically acclaimed jazz and creative music in the present era.

The effect of modeling a holistic approach to music-making and investigation cannot be underestimated as an influence on the musical

48 Kart (1986) refers to it as a “trend,” while other authors refer to it as a “movement” (Fordham 1999, Ansell 2011).
community that these individuals have taught and inspired. I can attest to the importance, early in my development, of reading scholarship by musicians who had studied with George Lewis, Anthony Davis, and Anthony Braxton. Studying with Braxton, I was inspired by the variety of Braxton's interests, particularly his attention to studying world cultures as inspiration for creating compositional systems.

**Anthony Braxton at Wesleyan**

Anthony Braxton was a first-generation AACM member who collaborated often with Wadada Leo Smith. He also, as mentioned earlier, lived in Woodstock throughout the 1970s and was a guiding artist and frequent presence at CMS, creating musical concepts that he developed in part through his participation as a teacher there. His Wesleyan course, entitled “Materials and Principle of Jazz Improvisation,” focused primarily on teaching students his own concepts that he had developed over the years. These included, by the time I was a student at Wesleyan, the various species of Ghost Trance Music, Language Music improvisation concepts, his Falling River graphic scores, and the various systems built into individual pieces from the 1980s onward.

Often the interpretation of symbols he used was left up to the individual student. For a class entitled “Materials and Principles of Jazz Improvisation,” very little traditional jazz improvisation was addressed. Because of this setup, Braxton was able to arrange large ensembles of students from very different backgrounds, all operating within his system and reading (or attempting to read)
his very complex notated music. In addition to his work as a guiding artist at CMS, Braxton taught various residencies at colleges in the 1970s. The most productive and well-known residency took place at Oberlin in 1978 and resulted in his uncompromising Arista album, *For Four Orchestras* (1978). Braxton also began to use Oberlin students Ned Rothenberg, Michael Phillip Mossman, and Bob Ostertag in his Creative Orchestra during this year.

Braxton’s Wesleyan ensembles served as the training ground for many musicians who would play in his professional ensembles, including Taylor Ho Bynum, Mary Halvorson (b.1980), Steve Lehman (b.1978), Andrew Raffo Dewar (b. 1975), Anne Rhodes, Carl Testa (b.1984), Aaron Siegel (b. 1977), and many others. Ted Reichman (b. 1973), an accomplished performer and composer in his own right, details Braxton’s pedagogical system from his perspective as a graduate student at Wesleyan:

At the beginning stages of the work with the class (at the beginning of the semester it’s a class, but by the end, it’s an ‘ensemble’), we work more on language improvisations...than we do later in the semester, as we start to gear up for a concert. Those introductory improvisations serve to gradually train the group in the skills required for improvisations in the compositions. We work on hearing each other and focusing on creating a unique sonic environment each time. Braxton always talks about ‘the transparent space’, a type of sound that brings out the nuances of each instrumentalist’s ideas, while preserving the clarity of the overall ensemble concept. These improvisations get the class ready for the quite different, but also quite similar improvisational situations within his pieces. (Reichman 1995:160)

Reichman notes the change in the group from class to ensemble, suggesting that
the class is essentially a training ground for students to learn Braxton’s concept and music. By focusing on the building blocks of his compositional system, Braxton gives his more perceptive students a way to incorporate his concepts into their own music, or perhaps more importantly, provides a template for developing their own musical systems.⁴⁹ There is a fundamental difference between this kind of teaching and the kind of music education that teaches students to play standards and chord changes and improvise using codified patterns, a la Barry Harris. While Harris teaches skills and prepares musicians to be able to operate inside of a tradition, Braxton (and Smith) modeled musical world building.

Adam Tinkle examines Anthony Braxton’s distinctive pedagogical approach, writing that as Braxton became more involved in teaching during his time in Woodstock in the 1970s, he became increasingly invested in developing a “universal,” non-instrument specific language music complex that worked as a gebräuchsmusik (“utility music” for a specific purpose). According to Tinkle, Braxton developed this strategy in part to familiarize his students with his unique approach to improvisation.

To my knowledge, this work is, along with its later companion piece Comp. 78, rather unique in the musical literature, a kind of notated gebräuchsmusik for improvisers, aimed at music learners and pitched for broad-based participation. Since these scores were worked out just down

⁴⁹ Although this was far from a new model, George Russell was already using his group at NEC to teach students his original music. He began using many of his students, including Marty Ehrlich, in his professional ensembles in the 1970s (Heining 2010:240).
the road from CMS and were taught and played there, they also reinforce
the structuring conceit of this dissertation: innovative pedagogical sites
which welcome students of mixed skill beget innovative compositional
responses to the problem of musical participation. (2015:257)

For Braxton, this arrangement proved to be highly beneficial; through his course
he was able to gain acolytes of his musical philosophies, and groom young
musicians to perform in his ensembles. Like Marilyn Crispell and the other young
musicians who he began to employ in his ensembles in his pre-professorial days,
during his tenure at Wesleyan, Braxton would use many of his students in his
professional ensembles once they had achieved a certain degree of proficiency
within his systems.

Braxton’s period at Wesleyan was the culmination of a journey that began
at CMS and his Oberlin residency. Arguing that many conservatories and
universities educate young musicians to be “stylists,” Braxton believes that “the
university should be in the business of teaching the traditionalists, teaching the
stylists, and teaching the restructuralists” (Braxton interviewed by Hemingway
2013). He also emphasizes the transformative nature of his holistic approach to
pedagogy, going on to say: “in my opinion the way to approach that is to have a
holistic thought-unit...to start the process of reconfiguring the psychology, and
the transpositions of the psychology that represents the experience of the artist”
(ibid.).

**Wadada Leo Smith at CalArts**

Well after his time in New Haven, Wadada Leo Smith would continue his
mentorship of young musicians through his African American Improvisation
program at CalArts. Smith’s program focused on his unique approach to music as
both a composer/improviser and independent scholar. Two of Smith’s “learning
goals,” in particular, stand out as noteworthy:

[Students] should:...have realized the unique relationship of the creative
music ensemble and the composer-musical director that exists as a
utopian model in society, functioning within the context of democratic
ideas embodying individual and collective expression;.....[and] be
equipped with writing skills and the ability to verbally articulate with
confidence the meaning and research embodied in the works
(compositions and performance) and their perspective and perceptions
regarding music performance, art in society and the role artists play in
transforming and shaping the world through critical and cultural
scholarship. (Smith 2012)
Rhetoric describing jazz as a uniquely American, and therefore
democratic, music is quite common. Sanchirico (2015) describes this trend:

Jazz cultural conservatives treat the music in a similar manner, which is to
say, they identify jazz as a solution to America’s social ills. They do so
because they view the music as the embodiment of traditional American
values and norms, especially those associated with the nation’s democratic
principles. Jazz, from this perspective, provides a model of (or metaphor
for) democracy, thereby serving as a guide to individual behavior and
group interaction. The jazz-as-democracy concept has come to be widely
accepted within the jazz community, even among those who do not fully
embrace the more ideological aspects of cultural conservatism.
(Sanchirico 2015:289)

However, Smith’s insistence that students understand his music, and creative
music making in general, as an exercise in true democracy, has a unique
perspective in the world of jazz pedagogy. Smith’s use of the term “utopian,” and his insistence that the US is not truly a democratic country (Smith interview 2015) illustrates that he has something different in mind than the empty talking points that Sanchirico describes. Indeed, Smith believes that his utopian ideal of a “New World Music” has fallen victim to the same problems that have befallen the utopian ideal of true democracy.

It [Smith’s idea of a ‘New World Music’] suffered the same problems of the idea of the notion of Democracy, Liberty, and Freedom. We have not a single republic or a nation on the planet that actually practices democracy. All of them practice some illusionary, unrealized notion about this idea, and usually it’s conditioned on so many faults that you can’t even stand up. (Smith interview 2015)

Smith’s additional requirement that students engage with musical criticism and develop the skills to articulate their musical vision is an outgrowth of his own beliefs that he enumerated 40 years earlier in notes. Smith believes that the skills to properly understand, represent, and promote one’s own music helps creative musicians to survive in a society that is “alien to what [they’re] doing.”

Because of the rules by which the world is dealing resulting in the present social-economic-political syndrome, it is necessary that every black creative artist document for himself, by whatever means available, all that he has to say. My warning to black people in all disciplines of life...is that it is now time to take unto ourselves the process of recording our own history---to take this process from the control of those who are alien by the very being of their identity group to what it is that we are doing. We do not need our creations dissected by others who cannot know what they see. We must not wait for others to document their own distortions of that
which we can say rightly for ourselves (Smith 1973, n.p.)

James Brandon Lewis (b. 1983), who became one of seven artists chosen to have their work released on Sony’s newly reformed Okeh imprint in 2013, is one of the last generation of Smith’s CalArts students. After what he describes as a relatively conventional undergraduate experience learning jazz at Howard University, he decided to attend CalArts after a brief period spent playing gospel music in Colorado. Lewis speaks of the importance of the kind of education that he received at CalArts:

I feel like it was the best, most eye-opening experience that I had in my whole life going to CalArts. Going to CalArts kind of showed me that being my own artist was ok, that I have a voice. So it kind of showed me that there’s another world out here. (James B. Lewis interview 2016)

Lewis, who studied both formally and informally with Wadada Leo Smith, cites him as a major influence. Smith introduced him to a multitude of musical systems, including the Schillinger system, the 1940s post-tonal approach to harmony, pioneered by Joseph Schillinger and adopted by many artists active in the AACM (G. Lewis 2008:58).

James Brandon Lewis credits Smith as not only important as a musical inspiration but also as a model of self-reliance through his DIY aesthetic. Much of Smith’s advice echoes both the values that he learned as a member of the AACM and the promotion and marketing skills that he honed in the 1970s in New Haven, helping to foster a creative music scene in a highly unlikely locale.

So it was a lot of different things and from a business standpoint, I learned a lot from Wadada about just being a self-starter. Like, we would talk about, how, ok, if you want to have a concert-set up your own. Just being
about the business of setting up your own stuff and not waiting. You know, if you want to do a concert, go rent a venue, make flyers, invite people, just being a self-starter. And he’s a person that really, truly inspired me to do that. To get your music out there and not wait, and don’t be complacent. (James B. Lewis interview 2016.)

As mentioned earlier, many of the students of Anthony Braxton, Wadada Leo Smith, George Lewis, and Anthony Davis at elite universities have become influential composers, scholars, and performers. However, Braxton student Taylor Ho Bynum points out an important conundrum that faces these programs, and the American university situation in general:

I think what is interesting, is that a lot of people on the scene now are products of those higher, those institutions... but it’s complicated too, because it’s like gentrification. There’s less diversity, the thought that, ‘Can you only discover this music if you can afford $60,000 a year in tuition?’ (Bynum interview 2016)

Bynum raises an important question: what does happen to the scene when the only access to the knowledge of creative musicians comes with a hefty price tag? Obviously, the limitations of access to elite universities to those musicians who can afford tuition is a problem for continued interest in the music by a healthy cross-section of American society. For this reason, the kind of community-based schooling that Lewis describes in relation to the AACM school (2008) remains an important alternative to, and supplement for these university programs.

However, the experiences of members of the New Haven scene such as Leo Smith and Pheeroan akLaff who were able to study informally and participate in the cultural life of elite universities (as well as the many students, like Jessica Pavone, who were able to study informally with Braxton many years later)
suggests that access to these composers and concepts does not have to be strictly limited to those who can afford it.

A New World Music? Smith Assesses his 1970s Writings

In *What is This Thing Called Jazz?* (2002), Eric Porter astutely examines Wadada Leo Smith’s philosophical writings from the 1970s. However, little attention has been paid to how Smith’s outlook has changed in the intervening 40 years. In a 2015 interview, I asked Smith his opinion on the state of the “New World Music” that he described in the 1970s. Smith felt that, like many of the idealistic dreams that seemed feasible in the 1970s, it never came to pass. He believes that the idea was hampered by the self-interest of the different musical cultures involved.

Well, it was essentially misnamed, because this idea of a New World Music has never been realized...So, that idea of a new world music, that’s been eclipsed...Because all the proponents of that, they went to Asia, or they went to Africa, or they went to South America, or etc. They went to all these places and they picked up these artists who played their own traditional music and put them in their ensembles, mixed their music with it and they called it World Music, that’s not world music, that’s ethnic music. (Smith interview 2015)

However, even though Smith seems somewhat disillusioned with what has come to pass in the last 40 years, he explains that what he was searching for has become clarified in the process.

when I wrote M1, I felt that there would come a time when this idea about world music would generate a true world music. But it doesn’t because everybody likes their little corner. Europeans like their corner, the
Americans like their corner, the Africans like their corner, the Indonesians like their corner, everybody likes their own fucking corner. What ends up happening is, it’s aborted. The whole thing that could have happened was aborted. But, but, there’s a but! The but is, in the meantime what was actually taking place, it was ‘systemic music.’ I should have named it systemic music. (ibid.)

Paying close attention to Smith’s words, it becomes clear that his original project wasn’t concerned with what Jason Stanyek has termed “intercultural collaboration” (2004:88) per se, but rather Smith was looking for universal systems that could help musicians communicate across difference.

Different approaches to “systemic music” have enabled composer/improvisers to create collaborations across generic and cultural difference in relatively egalitarian ways. For example, Butch Morris’ compositional system, Conduction, which is largely concerned with setting up forms for musicians to add their own content within, is particularly suited for bringing in musicians of all backgrounds. Accordingly, Morris collaborated with musicians from a variety of world traditions, particularly in his New York-based group Sheng which featured, among others, Chinese pipa player Min Xiao-Fen, Moroccan oud virtuoso Tarik Bendraham, and Malian musicians Balla Kouyate (balafon) and Yacouba Sissoko (kora) (“Sheng: A Unique Fusion of Global Sounds” 2003). Likewise, Smith has used his concept of Ankhrasmation, a type of symbolic graphic score, as a vehicle for intercultural experimentation. Smith has continued down this path, with works for gamelan, and chamber ensemble (“Moths, Flames, and the Giant Sequoia Redwood Tree”) on Light Upon Light (1999), and projects like Lake Biwa, featuring John Zorn, a string section and
Kwaku Obeng, a Ghanaian master drummer.

Smith argues that the music created by many musicians who continue to explore the incorporation of different traditional musics into their own concept represents a different phenomenon from what he described in 1975. Differentiating these projects from his idea of a “New World Music,” Smith refers to these projects as “ethnic music.” While his focus has changed over the years, Smith acknowledges the continued importance of intercultural collaborations and learning of traditional world musics in his own life (Smith interview 2015).

**Continued Intercultural Collaboration in the University**

While Smith is somewhat critical of the way that musicians around the world have failed to realize his utopian vision, his time at CalArts allowed him access to musicians from a variety of world traditions with whom he would continue to explore intercultural improvisation and music making. Speaking of his work with Ghanaian master drummer Alfred Ladzekpo at CalArts, Smith recalls:

I did many performances every year with them, and I would perform in their performances, and occasionally Alfred Ladzekpo would perform in some of my performances, so it was like an expanded idea of actually learning this music, from not just studying and taking lessons like I did at Wesleyan but through performances. (Smith interview 2015)

Alfred Ladzekpo would continue to be an important point of connection between Ghanaian traditional music and creative music in Los Angeles. Adam Rudolph, a CMS guiding artist who received his MFA from CalArts, wrote a piece
for Ladzekpo, centered around Ladzekpo’s Ewe traditional drumming. Rudolph and Smith, who were both at CalArts around the same time, would start a fruitful on and off collaboration during this period, eventually recording the duo album Compassion (2006) in 2002, playing compositions by both artists, and even reprising Smith’s composition “Song of Humanity.”

Likewise, Anthony Braxton collaborated with many of the professors teaching various musical traditions at Wesleyan. One important document of these collaborations is Braxton’s (1994) duo record with master drummer Abraham Adzenyah, Duo (Wesleyan) 1994. Adzenyah describes his approach to working with Braxton as similar to how he navigated performing with improvisers in his 1974 collaborations with Marion Brown, Wadada Leo Smith, and Steve McCall, on Geechee Recollections (1973). Adzenyah notes that he selected different variations that went along with the music that he was playing…when I played with Anthony he would play the horn and I would listen to it and I would apply my rhythm along with him. (Adzenyah interview 2015)

Although Adzenyah was playing variations of traditional rhythms from a variety of ethnic groups and contexts, coupled with Braxton’s woodwind explorations, the music on the album transcends the backgrounds of both musicians, creating a music that is greater than the sum of its parts. It is also radically different from many of Adzenyah’s earlier collaborations with Brown and Thornton. This recording, which is spread out over 2 CDs, is broken up into 2 tracks. Each track is a suite of Braxton and Adzenyah performing together, the pieces are

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50 Although they were at the school during the same time and collaborated, Rudolph did not study with Smith.
improvised and Adzenyah plays a range of Ghanaian traditional instruments.
Captured during a period when Braxton was investigating various world
traditions that involved repetitious trance-inducing musics, it is a fascinating
document. Braxton alternates between playing with and against Adzenyah’s
steady rhythms, including taking Adzenyah’s rhythms and developing motives
from them in a way that only a composer/improviser of Braxton’s caliber could.

Taylor Ho Bynum also describes how important collaborating with
musicians from world traditions would become in his own musical life.

I don’t think I’ve played a jazz gig with Wes [Brown] until I’d known him
for like 15 years, an improvised music gig. Like every gig that we had done
together was a West African gig, you know what I mean? (laughs) ...I
started working with (and) became close to Fred Ho, [it] was actually
through a lot of people who had emerged from that kind of world music
community, Wes and David Bindman and royal hartigan. That’s how I got
to know Fred. That’s what sort of connected me to the Asian American
creative music scene or community or history. But again, it sort of went
backwards, it went through that...I met Fred through people I met playing
African music...that’s how I hooked up with the Asian American jazz
scene. So it was definitely a big part of, I think coming up in that
community and that scene, I hugely appreciate it now, but you almost take
it for granted, because it’s almost assumed that you’re not just learning
Thelonious Monk tunes, but you’re learning bell patterns and rhythmic
patterns and different methodologies. ...even though it wasn’t ever
anything that I studied, I would never claim any knowledge or expertise
about those forms but it’s something that I interacted with as a player very
much. (Bynum interview 2016)

Bynum believes that his training in a multiplicity of world traditions has enabled
him to access a much greater variety of musical expression than a standard jazz
education. Although Bynum may only obliquely reference the many traditions that he has studied, his playing and composing have undoubtedly been broadened by those experiences. Certainly his use of Chinese and African folklore as an inspiration for his SpiderMonkey Strings project would not have come about without his exposure to these traditions at Wesleyan (Bynum 2013).

**Tzadik**

In the last 20 years, John Zorn (b. 1953), a central figure in Downtown II (Dessen 2003, Lewis 2004a) who spent time at CMS, has become an important advocate for many of the musicians from New Haven and Creative Music Studio of many racial and ethnic backgrounds. Tzadik Records, Zorn’s imprint, continues the DIY legacy of Wadada Leo Smith’s Kabell record company.

While Zorn’s music is often discussed in terms of its relationship to Euro-American experimentalism, his earliest experiences as an improviser were influenced by the African American 1960s collectives. Zorn was originally inspired to play the saxophone after hearing Anthony Braxton’s solo saxophone performances on *For Alto* (1968) (Milkowski 1998:226). He also had the opportunity to see Julius Hemphill, Hamiet Bluiett, and Oliver Lake (3/4 of what would become the World Sax Quartet) perform live as an undergrad at Webster College in St. Louis, briefly studying with Lake (F. Davis 1991, Bartlett 2006). Zorn’s collaborative group with George Lewis and guitarist Derek Bailey (1930-2005) that recorded *Yankees* (1983) for Celluloid records represented an important point of connection between the Downtown II scene, European free improvisation, and the AACM (Dessen 2003:149).
In 2004 Zorn re-released Wadada Leo Smith’s 1970s Kabell releases, _creative music 1_ (1972), _Reflectactivity_ (1975), _Song of Humanity_ (1977), and _Ahkreanvention_ (1979). Rare and long out-of-print, _Reflectactivity_ (1975) and _Song of Humanity_ (1977) (both albums that I refer to in Chapter 2) offer early glimpses into the original sound and concept that the young musicians of the New Haven scene were in the process of creating, making these valuable documents available to a generation of listeners that would find purchasing a copy of the original LPs exceptionally difficult. Additionally, in 2000 Zorn released a new recording of _Reflectactivity_ (2000) with Art Ensemble bassist Malachi Favors in place of Wes Brown. This marked a rare return to some of Smith’s earlier compositions and featured personnel that would, with the addition of Jack DeJohnette, become the original line-up for the Golden Quartet. Smith would record two albums with this personnel, with the group eventually featuring pianist Vijay Iyer (b. 1971) on _Tabligh_ (2008) and _Spiritual Dimension_ (2009), and Ronald Shannon Jackson in the drum chair on _Tabligh_ (2008). 

akLaff would join the group in 2009 performing alongside Art Ensemble percussionist Don Moye on _Spiritual Dimensions_. Beginning in 2010, the Golden Quartet would be composed of Anthony Davis, Pheeroan akLaff, and former CMS student and Anthony Braxton sideman, John Lindberg, who joined the group after Favors’ passing in 2004.

Tzadik has also become an important label for the less improvised, more highly notated music of jazz and creative music-identified performers. Although the label releases a wide variety of improvised and experimental music, Tzadik’s
“Composers Series” focuses primarily on more heavily notated music. Gerry Hemingway regards his Composers Series album *Chamber Works* (1999), recorded live at Merkin Hall, as one of his signature accomplishments. Hemingway recalls:

Well, the *Contiguous* string quartet is a major achievement, and (another piece on the record entitled) *The Visiting Tank*. I like the whole record, that was about a decade of work, it came together slowly. People really put in tremendous work, the string quartet was KILLING. (Hemingway interview 2014)

Because of Zorn’s advocacy, Hemingway’s music, and the notated music of many other composer/improvisers is available to listeners who otherwise would not be able to experience it. Others featured as part of the series are Mark Dresser, Anthony Coleman, Karl Berger, Fred Frith, Milford Graves (b. 1941), Gerry Hemingway, Julius Hemphill (1938-1995), Susie Ibarra, Andy Laster (b.1961), George Lewis, Billy Martin (b. 1963), Evan Parker, Marc Ribot (b. 1954), Ned Rothenberg, Elliot Sharp (b. 1951), and Wadada Leo Smith. Additionally, Tzadik’s Composer Series has released the music of other American experimentalists not as closely associated with the improvised music community including Alvin Singleton, Charles Wuorinen (b. 1938), Lee Hyla (1952-2014), and many others.

Albums released as part of The Composers Series highlight a wide array of each composer’s interests. Smith’s *Light Upon Light* is an excellent example. Released in 1999, it features ensembles ranging from Smith performing with electronics and voice (“Multiamerica”) to a gamelan ensemble. Alvin Singleton, who is perhaps best known for his notated chamber and orchestral music, also
presents a varied set of music on his portrait, *Somehow We Can* (2002). The album counts among its selections a scored improvisation by Wadada Leo Smith and Anthony Davis, a minimalist-influenced string quartet selection, and a dense, highly notated chamber piece, demonstrating the full breadth of Singleton’s compositional activity.

**Arcana**

John Zorn has also been an advocate for publishing the writings of many of the musicians involved in the New Haven and Woodstock scenes. The *Arcana* series, in its 7th volume as of 2017, has published the writings of George Lewis, Mark Dresser, Gerry Hemingway, Marilyn Crispell, Karl Berger, Adam Rudolph, and Wadada Leo Smith. Zorn has also published the writings of younger musicians who have performed with many of these artists. The *Arcana* series gives voice to musicians who are working through different compositional, spiritual, sociocultural, and personal issues. Zorn describes the series:

The acclaimed *Arcana* series is a small step toward educating the interested listener about the inner workings of the artistic process and is a major source on new music theory and practice in the 21st century. Rather than an attempt to distill or define a musician’s work, *Arcana* illuminates via personal vision and experience through manifestoes, scores, interviews, notes and critical papers written by the practitioners themselves. Essential for composers, musicians, students and fans alike, this challenging and original series provides insight into the work, mind and methodologies of some of the most remarkable creative minds of our time (Zorn 2014: “Arcana VII”)

*Arcana* is clearly the descendant of books like the Henry Cowell-edited
American Composers on American Music (1933), which contains one of the earliest uses of the term “creative music” in print (Becker 1933). However, unlike American Composers, the Arcana series contains material ranging from George Lewis’ intellectual discussions of improvisation and culture to Wadada Leo Smith’s abstract poetry to Kenny Wollesen’s descriptions of his homemade instruments. Outside of the themed Arcana V (2010), which focuses on music, spirituality and mysticism, Zorn leaves the content and style of each entry to the composers.

One mention that George Lewis makes of the importance of CMS to his personal development occurs in his Arcana essay exploring his experiences as a teacher and student of “improvised music.” Lewis directly reflects on the influence that his AACM experiences and apprenticeships with Wadada Leo Smith, Anthony Braxton and other older musicians had on him. Lewis writes that at CMS, “Following my AACM training, as well as the insights that I had gained from associations with such musicians as Richard Teitelbaum and David Behrman, the pedagogical methods that I began to develop in these, my earliest teaching experiences, reflected the influence of the apprenticeship experiences that I have described earlier. I taught as I had been taught, to some extent” (G. Lewis 2000:92).

Not only does Lewis’ essay (published in 2000) describe and presage many of his contributions to “the New Jazz Studies,” it also catalogues many of the musicians and scholars who, at the time, had taken up writing critically about improvisation. Importantly, he also mentions musician/scholars including James...
Newton, Wadada Leo Smith, and Anthony Braxton who have:

sought to create environments where experimental music becomes a site for investigating and eventually refashioning concepts of music and musicality. In such an environment, improvisative discourses disclose the extent to which musicians have a vital stake in the ongoing dialogue concerning the future of our planet. Music becomes a necessity for existence, rather than merely a pleasant way to pass lived time” (Lewis 2000:98)

Arcana contributors also write about cultural issues that reflect some of the engagement with critical and post-colonial theory that have become hallmarks of what many have begun calling “the New Jazz Studies.”

Miya Masaoka, a brilliant improviser and composer, who has performed with Gerry Hemingway and Anthony Braxton, writes about her experience as a modern American-born kotoist of Japanese descent. Masaoka’s Arcana contribution is a collage, including personal anecdotes that give insight into her personal and family history. These personal quotes are interspersed with other quotes relating to colonization, and colonial violence. She also questions the validity of John Cage’s philosophy of “sounds being themselves,” asking:

Can sounds exist in the Cageian ideal? At a brief yet finite moment it is possible for sounds to be just sounds, frequencies undulating in space, devoid of reference, cultural meanings or codes. Kant, although speaking of words, talked about the inability to know a thing in and of itself, apart from the world. Applied to the sonic realm, social context and the external world asserts its relevancy, and continues to frame the context within which sound is produced (2000:155)

Many of her anecdotes speak to the linkages and commonalities between musician/composers on both sides of the perceived divide of Afrological and
Eurological experimentalism. Reminding us in one anecdote that LaMonte Young started off as a saxophonist in Los Angeles, she recalls an encounter in which Young played her an early recording of his soprano saxophone improvisations in an ensemble with Billy Higgins on drums. She also recalls a conversation with Butch Morris over lunch in Amsterdam about Dutch composer Louis Andriessen. Morris pointed out that Andriessen started out on the street with his own ensemble, and changed his aesthetic orientation so that he could write for other ensembles, and receive consideration as a more legitimate “composer.”

[Andriessen] had started out with his own band on the street, and many years later he turned to ‘scored’ composer so that he could write for other (or any) ensembles. Both these composers had worked from the ground up (had ‘paid their dues’) and the thought gave me a grave sense of the amount of work and perseverance that is necessary if one is to have one’s work performed by one’s own orchestra. (2000:164)

Masaoka also describes her own conducting method as “a cultural crosscut of conducting traditions from Gagaku and East Indian music, from working with Cecil Taylor and observing the methods of Butch Morris and John Zorn” (2000:162). The entire essay, in both form and content, illustrates the hybridity, complexity, and multiplicity of influences on contemporary improvisers and the world in which they inhabit.

These highly personal essays are just as important in many ways as their academic counterparts written from an ostensibly more objective standpoint. Masaoka’s essay also points towards a more nuanced understanding of identity in improvised music, adding new shades of understanding to George Lewis’
Afrological/Eurological binary. The Arcana series, as a whole, illustrates the phenomenon that Benjamin Piekut illuminates in Experimentalism Otherwise: experimentalists documenting and shaping their own history. The striking multivalence of the work demonstrates the increasingly diverse nature of America’s creative music community. For many, these volumes have proved invaluable as collections of some of the most important writings on creative music, extending the canonical self-published work of Wadada Leo Smith and Anthony Braxton, both of whom were active in the 1970s as teachers in New Haven and CMS, respectively.

Reconfiguring CMS: The Creative Improvisers Orchestra

In 2011, Karl Berger reconfigured his large ensemble, The Creative Improvisers Orchestra, at John Zorn’s New York Lower East Side Alphabet City venue The Stone, named for Stephanie (b.1921-2014) and Irving Stone (1923-2003), patrons of Zorn’s and New York’s creative music scene in general (Greenland 2016:56). Berger’s residency started (on Friday, April 15) with a performance featuring musicians drawn from students and instructors who were participants of the programs at Creative Music Studio during the 1970s and 80s. Shortly after this performance, Berger conducted what he called a “CMS Workshop,” with musicians who would eventually make up the membership of Berger’s Creative Improvisers Orchestra. Eventually, the momentum that Berger started beginning with the digitization of the CMS archives at Columbia

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51 Lewis writes in a follow-up essay of his intention to more fully theorize this binary (“Afterword” 2004: 168-169).
University in 2008 and the Stone residency of his orchestra as a “CMS Workshop” would culminate in a reformation of CMS in 2013 that would resemble, in part, its original 1970s and 80s reincarnation.

Berger’s performances were held more or less every Monday night at the Stone during 2011. Monday night, often a slow night for professional musicians, is inextricably linked to the modern big band tradition in New York. At the Village Vanguard, the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra (later the Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra, and now the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra) has been performing on Monday nights since their formation in 1966 (“Vanguard Jazz Orchestra”). Previously, Monday nights were off nights at the Stone, except for The Stone Seminars, featuring talks from different creative musicians on topics of the artists’ choosing (thestonenyc.com).

In late 2011, after Karl Berger’s residency had ended, I began attending Butch Morris’ workshop/performance series on Mondays, part of a new series that Zorn was calling, “New Music Observatory.” In the tradition that I described, initiated by Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra (among others), Zorn positioned this series as part of the “New York Tradition of Big Band Mondays.” Morris’ workshop introduced me to conducted improvisation, led to my increased interest in “systemic music” and eventually allowed me to perform weekly with his group at Nublu, an iconic venue in NYC’s East Village. As mentioned earlier, David Murray’s Big Band, featuring musicians active in the New Haven scene and their collaborators (Anthony Davis, George Lewis, John Purcell, Henry Threadgill), was an important laboratory for Butch Morris to develop his
Conduction language.

Later, I would also perform with Karl Berger, and meet many CMS associated musicians who had known Berger since the 1970s and 80s, cueing me in to the importance of CMS to the modern history of conducted improvisation and systemic music in general. Many of these ensembles used artists associated with CMS and were led by CMS guiding artists (Karl Berger, Adam Rudolph, Anthony Braxton). Although Karl Berger’s conducting style is rather amorphous and does not have a clearly defined vocabulary beyond a few signs, performing in his group was an invaluable experience. Playing with Berger and listening to him talk about Don Cherry and other artists that were important to his development, in particular, were important in offering a window into his concept and development, and guiding my research.

The CMS workshops, which are only two weeks long now, are still held near Berger’s Woodstock home at Full Moon Lodge in Big Indian, NY. Many of the guiding artists were former participants or musicians who play with Karl Berger presently. Some of the guiding artists since 2013 include former CMS participants (both students and guiding artists) Peter Apfelbaum, Steve Gorn, Marilyn Crispell, Cyro Baptista, Steven Bernstein (b.1961), Adam Rudolph, and Oliver Lake. Also represented are musicians associated with Downtown II and The M-Base collective like Dave Douglas, Don Byron, Marty Ehrlich, Vijay Iyer, Steve Coleman, and Rudresh Mahanthappa.

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52 Berger explains in Chapter 3 that he feels that using too many signs takes away from the intuitive spirit that he wishes to bring to his conducted improvisations.
JCOI: Continuing to push the boundaries of composition and improvisation

The Jazz Composers Orchestra Institute (JCOI) was started by a group of composers led by George Lewis in 2010. The JCOI is an extension of earlier programs created by the American Composers Orchestra (ACO) like the Improvise! Festival in 2004, which was led by Anthony Davis and Alvin Singleton (b.1940) and featured compositions by, and roundtables with Butch Morris, George Lewis, Gerry Hemingway, and many others. Singleton, whose work I discuss earlier in this chapter, was a graduate student at Yale in the 1970s and has collaborated with Davis and Wadada Leo Smith. The institute, under the direction of George Lewis, included two of his Yale classmates, Anthony Davis and Jane Ira Bloom.

JCOI is an initiative of the ACO, which is one of the few organizations that has sponsored both creative musicians associated with the avant-garde and collaborations with Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. I had the privilege of attending the third iteration of the Institute in the summer of 2015. Among the instructors were Anthony Davis, James Newton, Nicole Mitchell (b. 1967) and Steve Coleman. The curriculum that Newton and Davis taught, in particular, was aimed at highlighting the influences of jazz and creative music on contemporary classical music. Steve Loza, a professor at UCLA, where the workshops took place, tied the mission of the JCOI to UCLA’s long history of musical hybridity, articulating a utopian vision not unlike the one presented in Smith’s Notes.

While I walked through UCLA’s Schoenberg Hall, the place where I had
been introduced to the discipline of ethnomusicology, I saw signs everywhere that proclaimed the 50th anniversary of the university’s ethnomusicology program. The coincidence that 2015 marked both the official 50th anniversary of one of the USA’s first ethnomusicology programs and the 50th anniversary of the AACM (and the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965) was not lost on me.

An opening lecture by James Newton highlighted the contributions of jazz composers to American concert music. He also demonstrated the influences of jazz and other African and Afro-diasporic musics on the compositions of European and Euro-American concert music. It became clear that a crucial part of the mission of the JCOI is to educate students, who all come from a jazz and creative music background, on the important contributions that African American composers have made to American classical music. While I was familiar with many of the pieces and composers, it was refreshing to hear this subject (which I had learned about largely through independent study) articulated in an institutional context.

In many ways, the JCOI is a continuation of the project of AACM artists, including Wadada Leo Smith and Anthony Braxton, who wrote in the 1970s and 1980s about the forgotten contributions of African American composers outside of the realm of “jazz.” Anthony Braxton writes in *Tri Axium, Volume 3*, in a section entitled “Black Notated Music” that: “The black composer through the proffessional continuance of time has come to be viewed as either lackeys from the western art music continuum, or simply imitators of European classical

53 Although Conner (2011) points to 1960 as the year that ethnomusicology department at UCLA was founded.
music” (Braxton 1985:10). Explaining that, “There are only a few books that devote any space to the existence of the black composer, and usually the whole reality of this subject is brushed off in one or two paragraphs (the understanding being that the music doesn’t merit much focus)” (ibid. 18), he adds:

To experience the music collectively produced by these composers is to experience a music that includes spirituals, Gospel, so-called jazz, world music and yes-even western art music. The dynamic spectrum of these contributions has yet to be dealt with, for to really view the significance of black notated music it is important to understand the ‘reality-position’ each composer affirms in his (or her) own individual focus...For while the dynamic spectrum of classical music encompasses many forms and periods in itself, the black composer can also draw on another whole reality. (ibid. 21)

In relation to the first iteration of the Jazz Composers Orchestra’s compositions, George Lewis has described the music created by the multiracial group of jazz-identified composers as having a similar breadth of stylistic range. Bill Millkowski has reported on this.

During an intermission panel discussion at the Saturday night concert, Lewis told the audience, ‘We just went through boot camp with 30-plus composers chewing the fat. It’s been a fascinating, really rich week for us.’ After a lengthy pause, he added, ‘I’m still not sure what a jazz composer is. It’s a rubric of convenience at this point. Because all week we had a lively discourse with composers who transcend and stomp style into the ground.’ (Millkowski 2010)

Another important aspect of JCOI was to educate the composers on the extended possibilities of each instrument, and to introduce composers to the latest developments in new music composition.
Nicole Mitchell wrote a great piece, Mark Helias wrote a great piece. So people who—I thought hey, these are cutting edge people, right? But they’re all sitting in that room, and when we put on Gérard Grisey ‘Partiels,’ man, everybody’s mouth in that room went open; they’d never heard that, they didn’t know. ‘Is that what people are writing now?’ I said, ‘No, that’s what they were writing in 1975.’ [Laughter] So it wasn’t just based on how does it work, what was the role of the computer, how has music analysis changed, all these kinds of things. (Lewis interviewed by Bendian 2013:46)

Despite the backgrounds of Lewis, Davis, and a majority of the guiding artists in creating works that deal with the blurring of lines between composition and improvisation, the compositions that students create often are limited in the amount of improvisation that they contain. Many of the pieces are performed by local symphony orchestras with little background in improvisation and the improvising composer is not allowed to perform with the orchestra. Nevertheless, in many ways, The JCOI continues the work that Davis, Newton, Lewis, and others have been engaged in since their time working together in the 1970 and 80s. The organization continues to be an important point of contact between the classical and new music community and the creative music community in the United States, and in many ways, the mission of the JCOI continues the mission of the CMS in promoting musical hybridity and cultural interchange.

The Tri-Centric Orchestra

The late 2000s and early 2010s were an important period for creative large ensembles in NYC. Anthony Braxton, who honed many of his large ensemble concepts during his time in Woodstock, particularly as a CMS guiding
artist, was instrumental in this development. The Tri-Centric Orchestra, made up of composer/improvisers who both play in the orchestra and compose for it, represents a different model of bringing jazz and creative music into an orchestral setting than the JCOI. While the JCOI is focused on giving jazz and creative music composers the skillset to write music for a Western classical orchestra employing a minimal amount of improvisation, the Tri-Centric Orchestra provides a platform for composers to attempt to write music unencumbered by these stylistic and conceptual limitations.

The year 2010 would mark the formation of the new Tri-Centric Foundation and the Tri-Centric Orchestra, which would perform Anthony Braxton’s opera Trillium E. The foundation and orchestra are Braxton’s organizations, largely run by Taylor Ho Bynum and other musicians associated with Braxton. Bynum recalls that he and Braxton began to work “more closely together and he gave me more production responsibility, particularly when we were producing a pre-production for the opera Trillium E, the opera we recorded in 2010.” Eventually, given the scope of their undertaking, Braxton and Bynum realized that they would require the support of a non-profit, and they ended up resurrecting an earlier organization that Braxton had started with his MacArthur grant (Bynum interview 2016).

The Tri-Centric Orchestra is a collection of about 50 composer/improvisers who meet to perform each other’s music. Since the recording of Trillium E, at the time of this writing the Tri-Centric Orchestra has performed three “commissioning concerts.” Bynum describes the mission of the
orchestra and the underlying concept:

It wasn’t the idea of ‘letting jazz musicians write for orchestra,’ it was more the model of ‘what can a creative musician do with a creative orchestra?’ Like, giving composers the opportunity to work on large-scale ideas, but that are true to their own aesthetic, that are not exclusively adopting a Western European aesthetic. (ibid.)

Bynum describes the flexibility and training of the orchestra, stressing that the ability to both accurately interpret complex notation and improvise at a high level was uncommon when Braxton was first writing large ensemble music.

It’s really a large group that can comfortably read rigorously notated materials AND comfortably follow conducted improvisation AND comfortably exist as a soloistic improvisation... You know, Anthony was writing music that called for this 40 years ago. But there weren’t necessarily a diversity of artists who could do all of that. There were great improvisers but they might not be great readers, there’s great readers who may not be great improvisers. I feel like as a community of artists, we’ve caught up to that now. (ibid.)

Braxton’s first major album of creative orchestra music, *Creative Orchestra Music 1976* (1976) (produced by Michael Cuscuna for Arista Novus, recorded mere months prior to the *Wildflowers* sessions) included CMS and AACM collaborators, such as Karl Berger, Fredric Rzewski, Richard Teitelbaum, Roscoe Mitchell, and Leo Smith, along with musicians from the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra, who were renowned soloists and readers/session-players.

An examination of the personnel of his live performances a few years later, particularly *Creative Orchestra (Köln) 1978*, on hat Art (also the first recording of Braxton’s to prominently feature language music improvisations) reveals the beginning of Braxton’s attempt to cultivate a group of younger musicians who
would have the skills to excel in the three areas that Bynum describes.

Even a cursory look at the 1978 group, which featured Marilyn Crispell, shows a wealth of young musicians who would develop into influential performers and composers. The saxophone section alone, composed of Dwight Andrews, Marty Ehrlich, JD Parran and Ned Rothenberg, would go on to play with a wide variety of creative orchestras. Parran, Andrews and Ehrlich were all longtime members of Anthony Davis’ Episteme ensemble (Parran, Ehrlich, and Crispell recorded on Davis’ X [1992]). As mentioned in Chapter 4, projects like X, which used Davis’ own ensemble with an outside orchestra, had already attempted to bridge the divide between orchestral musicians and improvisers. In particular, one of Davis’ strategies for achieving a personal sound when writing for a classical orchestra has been to embed soloists from his ensemble who are familiar with his unique approach to improvisation within the orchestra.

Tri-Centric takes this idea to its logical conclusion by using an orchestra composed completely of musicians who are equally at home in traditional and experimental improvisation and interpretation. Contrasting the approach of the JCOI with the Tri-Centric Orchestra, Taylor Ho Bynum believes that an orchestra that is familiar with many different procedural approaches to improvisation (and one in which the member/composers all have a personal stake in the music) is a more effective vehicle for the realization of members’ compositions than a traditional orchestra.

there’s other projects like the American Composers Orchestra and Columbia do. Those are great, but for me they’re a little...patronizing in a way. Like, we’re gonna let jazz composers, like we’ll show them how to
write for orchestra, but there’s not a dialogue. (Bynum interview 2016)

In many ways the Tri-Centric Orchestra is a much more powerful, if less sustainable, idea than the collaborative model of the JCOI. The JCOI represents an important bridge between the creative music community and America’s Western classical music community. However, composers in the program are constrained by the limits of the performers of the local symphonic orchestras tasked to perform the music, the vast majority of whom are not well-versed in improvisation.

So far all of the events have taken place at Braxton’s New York home base, Roulette, in Brooklyn. I had the pleasure of attending the first and third Tri-Centric commissioning concerts (in 2013 and 2015, respectively) and they were fascinating in their breadth. Many of the performers in the Tri-Centric orchestra also play in other large creative ensembles in New York. These musicians, many of whom have played in various ensembles with Braxton (including his student ensembles at Wesleyan) are steeped in various experimental practices and have a wide range of compositional styles and musical interests.

**Contemporary Approaches Informed by The CMS and New Haven Scene**

The music of the Tri-Centric Orchestra represents the latest in a continuum of creative music production informed by the hybridity, eclecticism, and compositional rigor associated with the New Haven scene and CMS. The first Tri-Centric concert featured works by Kamala Sankaram (b. 1978), Jason Hwang (b.1957), and Nicole Mitchell. In the spirit of the musicians of the New Haven
scene, these composers represent a contemporary response to the AACM-inspired approach of combining improvisation and composition, and devising novel “systemic” approaches to improvisation. They are also influenced by a multiplicity of sources, including world traditions.

Kamala Sankaram presented a multi-sectioned piece inspired by astrophysical phenomena, that features different approaches for improvisers in each movement: “A hidden, individualized mp3 track cues the players to move from one section of the piece to the next” (Sankaram, n.d.: “Dark Flow”). In addition to the written material, Sankaram included an electronic track which includes “humpback whales...voices taken from numbers stations around the US... and a clip from the SETI [Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence] site” (Sankaram, n.d.: “Dark Flow”).

The piece is remarkable in its musical and conceptual breadth, containing repeated out-of-time tone clusters and cells, intense individual and group solos with a variety of different groups accompanying, from a few string players to full rhythm section. “Dark Matter(s),” the final part of the piece, concludes with a fairly-straightforward middle eastern/Balkan/klezmer inspired arrangement for big band with a rousing 7/8 section.

Jason Hwang’s piece contained many composed elements that were cued

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54 SETI was founded in 1984. According to their website, their mission is to “explore, understand, and explain the origin and nature of life in the universe, and to apply the knowledge gained to inspire and guide present and future generations” (“Our Mission.”).

55 Sankaram cites as her main inspiration for this section Anthony Braxton’s diamond clef. Although the instruments have the same line they “can play them in any clef they want” (Sankaram 2018).
and combined using his conducted improvisation language, which is a combination of signals derived from his work with Butch Morris and Braxton. While the written material was already relatively complex, Hwang has developed a framework to get maximum variety and flexibility from the orchestra. Through transposition cues and cueing different musicians in and out, Hwang is able to get a wide array of sounds and textures from the orchestra. Hwang explains:

I have cues for transposing phrases and that’s how I could get unison lines, through transposition cues and then that would pivot the improvisation into another harmonic plane. So then I could later on bring back that cue as written with the whole orchestra. So you could take parts of it and play with it as improvisation and then there are of course different aggregates of whether it’s a soloist, duo, quartet, you can assign aggregates and bring in the orchestra little by little. But what I discovered about it that was interesting was, you know, usually when you’re looking at an orchestral score, notes laid out, there’ll be a certain amount of notes within a chord. With the string orchestra if I just held my hand out to have a held note without anything written on the page I can have a much more complex harmonic color because it could have, there’s 38 musicians there, there could be 38 different notes and it’s not all in a twelve tone system. (Hwang interview 2013)

The kind of work that Sankaram and Hwang were able to do with Tri-Centric would be completely impossible with the skillset and circumstances (particularly the limited time and attendant pay scale) available in a traditional orchestral setting.

Braxton’s own activities revolve increasingly around composing his Trillium opera cycle, a complex of pieces that utilize theatrical elements. His most recent Trillium performance in 2014 was an incredible spectacle featuring,
on one night, a local champion double-dutch team, the Jazzy Jumpers. In this opera, Braxton incorporates more consciously idiomatic elements, including a country-inspired solo violin performance by Sam Bardfeld. Like the swing and modal jazz elements that Anthony Davis brought into X for a programmatic effect, Braxton’s recent operatic writing has allowed him to incorporate genre-specific music that he would probably otherwise avoid in a different setting. The opera was released as the box set, *Trillium J* (2016), including studio recordings of the work as well as a BluRay of the filmed performance. The opera, by turns hilarious, virtuosic, and inscrutable is a unique document and an expert realization of Braxton’s concept as a multi-media, immersive spectacle.

**The Current State of Creative Music in New Haven**

Just as in the 1970s, New Haven in the 2000s and 2010s has managed to cultivate a vital creative music scene. In 2007 Taylor Ho Bynum moved to New Haven after a four-year stint living in New York. Bynum relates that much of the energy of the vibrant creative music scene in New Haven in the 1970s and 80s has dissipated throughout the years. However, he does acknowledge the importance of that history to the current scene stating: “many of us who are here now are here because of Tri-Centric connections and because of the history of music here. It didn’t keep a geographic home but a vibrational aesthetic, creative continuum that connects directly through that” (Bynum interview 2016).

Bynum, who has been one of Anthony Braxton’s chief collaborators during the last 15 years, has helped to inspire a growing creative music renaissance in
New Haven. He relates that his interest in moving to New Haven from Brooklyn in 2007 was due to a variety of factors. As a student of Bill Lowe, Anthony Braxton and others, he was aware of the importance of the 1970s creative music scene in New Haven from a relatively early age.\textsuperscript{56}

One of the important venues and centers of musical activity in the city is Firehouse 12, a converted firehouse that operates as a performance venue and recording studio. The space was opened in 2005 by Nick Lloyd with money he received through a grant funding artists who were interested in renovating and repurposing unused buildings in New Haven (Bernstein 2007:11.1).

Bynum became involved with Firehouse 12 in 2005 (Chinen 2009:C1) after reconnecting with Lloyd, a middle school classmate, during a stint in New Haven performing Anthony Davis’ incidental music for a 2004 production of King Lear (Bynum interview 2016). The performance, which also featured Jazz Passenger Bill Ware with musical direction by percussionist Eli Fountain, featured an all-black cast and was “set in the Olmec civilization, which flourished between 1200 and 400 B.C. in Mesoamerica (now Mexico and Central America)” (Rizzo 2004).\textsuperscript{57}

Early in the life of the venue, Bynum handled the booking for Firehouse 12’s concert series and provided recording artists for the record label. Bynum, who was still living in Brooklyn when he and Nick Lloyd began their

\textsuperscript{56} Bynum studied with Lowe a trombonist/composer, former Wesleyan music professor, and CMIF member, while in high school in the Boston area.

\textsuperscript{57} The production also may have been an inspiration for Davis’ 2013 opera Lear on The Second Floor, which recasts Lear in a much different setting, as a neuroscientist battling with dementia (Chute 2013).
collaboration, brought in some of his friends and collaborators to record for the label during its first year, including fellow Wesleyan undergraduate alum Mary Halvorson, Tyshawn Sorey (b.1980), and Peter Evans (b.1981). He also brought two mentors to the label: Anthony Braxton, and trumpeter/composer Bill Dixon, a longtime educator and founder of the Jazz Artists Guild (Bynum interview 2016). One of the first releases was the impressive boxed set recorded by Braxton’s 12+1tet featuring Nicole Mitchell and Steve Lehman, *Live at Iridium (2006)* (2007). Among the other artists who have recorded on the label are fellow Tri-Centric Orchestra members Ingrid Laubrock (b.1970) and Nicole Mitchell.

While Bynum sees the new activity in New Haven as a sort of rebirth, he doesn’t appreciate that he is often treated as a “local” artist.

I’ve been very insistent that I’m not interested in being a ‘local’ performer. I happen to live in New Haven, I’m committed to New Haven, but if I’m going to perform at a university or festival then I need to be paid and treated as I am when I perform at universities and festivals around the country and abroad. (Bynum interview 2016)

Ultimately, despite the occasional perceived disrespect, Bynum enjoys living in New Haven, in part, because he is still close enough to New York City to be considered a New York artist, which he believes is important for his prospects for international touring.58 He also is close enough to New York City that he is able to continue many of the musical associations that he has cultivated throughout the years (ibid.).

In addition to Bynum’s activities in New Haven, bassist/composer Carl

58 For more on New York City’s place in the global jazz and creative music scene in the 21st century see Scherbenske (2014:199-202).
Testa, a student of Anthony Braxton at Wesleyan and a member of Braxton’s ensembles, also curates a New Haven-based series focusing on creative music. He began “The Uncertainty Series,” in 2007 at Never Ending Books at 810 State Street in New Haven (Lutz, 2011:CT16). Testa often features local musicians and Wesleyan graduate students or musicians who are in Connecticut to perform at other venues, including Firehouse 12.

New Haven native, guitarist Joe Morris (b.1955) and Wethersfield, CT resident, trumpeter Stephen Haynes (b. 1955), who studied with Bill Dixon and performed with him for many years, curate a long-running series at Real Art Ways in Hartford which feature the duo with both local and New York-based guest artists. The two also create a larger ensemble every year for a marathon concert, which they have named, appropriately, “Spectacle” (Lutz 2015A:CT8). I was privileged to perform in the first concert in 2014, which also featured Taylor Ho Bynum, violist Mat Maneri, saxophonist Jim Hobbs, drummer Jerome Deupree and a large contingent of Morris’ former students from New England University.

**Wadada Leo Smith’s *America’s National Parks* at Firehouse 12**

Recently, Wadada Leo Smith recorded his latest record, at Firehouse 12, *America’s National Parks* (2016), with a group that he calls the “Golden Quintet,” adding cellist Ashley Walters to the Golden Quartet line-up of Smith, Anthony Davis, bassist John Lindberg, and Pheeroan akLaff. It was a significant event, reuniting Davis, akLaff, and Smith for a recording that is, in many ways, an
extension of their earlier collaborations. It was their third recording together after *Spiritual Dimensions*, and the sweeping Pulitzer-prize nominated *Ten Freedom Summers* (2012), and the first with akLaff as the sole drummer (*Spiritual Dimensions* featured Art Ensemble drummer/percussionist Don Moye alongside akLaff and *Ten Freedom Summers* also features Susie Ibarra [b.1970] on drums and percussion).

The music, given to the musicians in the form of full scores, was in some sections written in conventional notation, to be realized in a negotiated, proportional tempo. In other sections it was notated graphically, in striking colors with an array of symbols and shapes, each of which each have their own significance in Smith’s *Ankhrasmation* language. As Pheeroan akLaff noted to me, it was also the first time that Smith used complex irregular subdivisions of the beat.

I was fortunate to witness this session, which took place on May 5, 2016, through the invitation of akLaff. It was an especially thrilling experience to witness Smith’s music being recorded live. Watching multiple takes of each section of his compositions and listening to his directions to the musicians provided me with valuable insight into Smith’s process. It was especially incredible to watch these pieces with the scores in hand. Seeing the group in performance allowed me to get a better idea of how proportional notation works in practice.

Although the group was allowed to negotiate the tempo (and was encouraged to in places) at their own collective pace, Smith was very much in
charge. He cued sections and dictated the placement of key figures; his mixture of freedom and control are deeply steeped in a creative music philosophy concerned with negotiating players’ personal freedoms within a carefully defined framework. Also in attendance were Carman Moore (b.1936), a composition professor at Yale in the 1970s and a participant in the 2004 ACO Improvise! roundtables (“American Composers Orchestra - Improvise! Concert Schedule.”), DJ Hardedge (Velibor Pedevski), a frequent collaborator of Smith’s, and other (primarily NYC-based) creative musicians including Graham Haynes and Brandon Ross.

Witnessing this recording session was an especially fortuitous occasion for me. The last time that Davis recorded with Smith in New Haven was in 1976 for Song of Humanity (1977), Smith’s second Kabell release featuring both Davis and akLaff (with Oliver Lake and Wes Brown rounding out the group). The state-of-the-art Firehouse recording studio is a far cry from The Gallery, the bare bones New Haven performance space in which Song of Humanity was taped. As a venue for live performance that doubles as a recording studio and a rather swanky bar, Firehouse 12 is a rarity for creative music venues.

Gerry Hemingway, who has taken it upon himself to preserve a large collection of audio and visual documentation of his own involvement with the 1970s New Haven scene, also has his archive housed at Firehouse 12. His collection of reel-to-reel tapes include many fascinating concerts of groups that never commercially recorded, offering a glimpse into what Lewis, Hemingway, and Davis sounded like in their early 20s as the group Advent. His archive also
contains documentation (flyers, reel-to-reel tapes, photos) of many of the other performances and unreleased recording sessions (including an initial run-through of the music on *Song for the Old World*, featuring him and Déja Vu percussionist Jarawa in place of Ed Blackwell) that he participated in during that era.

Hemmingway sees himself as a documentarian of this scene and period.

I am in a somewhat unique position, because I feel like I am the only one that remembers almost everything that happened and also can put it in the right time frame. I actually have notes on all this stuff, I have the programs, so I feel compelled to get on the stick with doing...in my case I am interested to do a video documentary of everything. (Hemingway interview 2014)

He also has plans to stage a grand reunion of many of these musicians for a performance in New Haven or elsewhere in Central Connecticut. Of all of the musicians who I spoke to from the New Haven scene, Hemingway was especially eager to talk with me and saw his mission and mine intersecting in important ways.

The Next Generation of Creative Musicians: Three Studies

After the decades of the “Jazz Wars” and the “Young Lion” movement, as Bynum points out, there is a new interest in “creative music,” and the avant-garde. Recently there has been a profusion of projects that incorporate world and popular music influences into an avant-garde sensibility.

The kind of musical training and eclectic interests that the New Haven musicians engaged in has become more relevant in light of these developments.
Three saxophonists, Kamasi Washington (b. 1981), James Brandon Lewis (b. 1983), and Steve Lehman, recently recorded albums influenced by their experiences with hip-hop, different world traditions, and the avant-garde. All three have developed original voices drawing from a multiplicity of sources, and have all found original ways to incorporate their studies of world music and conceptual training into something original. In 2015 and 2016, a plethora of news and magazine stories were published focusing on musicians exploring the boundaries between jazz and hip-hop (see Weiner 2015a, 2015b, Cohen 2015, John Lewis 2016). My childhood friend Kamasi Washington was at the center of many of these articles. Another friend of mine who also played the saxophone and studied music in Los Angeles, James Brandon Lewis (who I met playing with Karl Berger in 2014), created an album that explored the interstices between jazz, Afro-diasporic traditional musics, and hip-hop. Steve Lehman, who has studied with Anthony Braxton and George Lewis, created an album that explores some of the same conceptual territory, albeit in a radically different way.

All three musicians have, in different ways, taken part in the kind of musical training that this dissertation explores. Of particular interest to this dissertation is Wadada Leo Smith’s mentorship of James Brandon Lewis, Braxton’s mentorship of Steve Lehman and Washington’s experience studying world music in UCLA’s ethnomusicology program and experiences with James Newton as a member of the Luckman Orchestra under Newton’s leadership. As mentioned in the introduction, one of the deciding factors for my attending UCLA (and my introduction to ethnomusicology) was the fact that Kamasi and
other slightly older musicians with whom I had attended the LA Multi-School Band had already enrolled in the program.

i. Kamasi Washington

Los Angeles is a town whose musical identity is based in musical syncretism between popular musics and the jazz tradition. Since the 1940s Central Avenue scene this has been the case. During that period there was a wide range of music being performed in the clubs of Central Avenue, from the blues of T-Bone Walker to Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker and other artists on the cutting edge of jazz (Bryant, et. al 1998:182). I was fortunate enough, along with Kamasi, the Bruner brothers, and other musicians active in the Brainfeeder Records scene, to become immersed in this musical milieu and learn a great deal about musicianship and improvisation from Reginald Andrews. Mr. Andrews, who has since retired, was the last of a dying breed: a high school band director in the great tradition of Chicago’s Walter Dyett (who taught Nat “King” Cole and Dinah Washington, in addition to many AACM members (Lewis 2008:12-13)), and Los Angeles’ own Samuel Browne and Lloyd Reese.  

Andrews led the multi-school band out of Alain Locke High School in Watts, the neighborhood of Los Angeles where Don Cherry, Charles Mingus, Buddy Colette and many others began their musical journey. He was a mentor to

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59 A group of jazz musicians who have recorded with Flying Lotus, the founder of Brainfeeder Records, an LA-based electronic musician and producer who is also the nephew of Alice Coltrane.  
60 A brief sample of Browne’s students would include Horace Tapscott, Art Farmer, Don Cherry and Chico Hamilton. Reese taught, among many others, Charles Mingus, Buddy Colette, and Dexter Gordon (Isoardi 2006:23, 248).
Ndugu Chanler, Patrice Rushen, Tyrese Gibson, the members of the hip-hop group The Pharcyde, and a host of other musicians representing a wide array of African American musical traditions from the 1970s through the 2000s. Andrews was also a friend of UGMAA founder Horace Tapscott and legendary Los Angeles big band leader Gerald Wilson. His book for the Multi-School Band contained a diverse range of music, including original arrangements written by Tapscott and Wilson, arrangements of compositions by Stevie Wonder, Grover Washington, Jr., and the ubiquitous Basie charts. In addition to his relationship with the creative musicians associated with UGMAA, Andrews was a middle school classmate of Butch Morris.

While much has been written about the influence of hip-hop and contemporary black popular music on Washington’s critically acclaimed album *The Epic* (2015) released by Brainfeeder, the timbres, melodies and rhythmic complexity of his pieces reflect his interest in many world traditions. Although his music is also influenced by the pan-African inspired collaborations of the 1970s, he has incorporated his study of world musics into his compositions since he was an undergraduate student at UCLA. Washington recalls using material from a gamelan piece that he was studying at the time:

[When] we made that *Young Jazz Giants* record, I straight up took some gamelan shit. [plays the theme on piano in two hands in an approximation of pelog with different rhythmic rates happening at the same time]

(Washington interview 2017)

While at UCLA, he was introduced to many different world traditions, particularly West African and Indonesian music, that weren’t previously on his
radar. He recalls that one of the most important things that he learned was the mechanics of different traditions.

I was kind of forced to really study it for real, not just like as a tool to help me play jazz. I had to take the music as its own entity. I took a Ghanaian drumming class...[but] most of my learning was through listening to stuff and studying the theory behind it. (ibid.)

He also recalls taking specific musical materials from his studies and incorporating them into his music. Echoing Adam Rudolph about his own study of different traditions, that “it’s like you ingest it and it becomes part of your DNA... you eat it and it becomes part of who you are (Rudolph interview 2014),” Washington believes that:

It’s seeped its way into the fabric of who I am. I didn’t really spend as much time playing the instruments, but it really opened me up on an inquisitive level. Listening to the music, appreciating it, and then you’re looking up and writing tunes and it sounds like something that you heard. (Washington interview 2017)

Washington has also been influenced by the spirit of ethnomusicological inquiry to make connections between different musics when he’s traveling.

I was taking a West African music class and I heard a piece that had [a specific 12/8 pattern]. Then as I travelled, I heard these influences around the world, I went to Brazil and I heard that same kind of thing happening there...I started touring and stuff like that and everywhere I would just try and hear how they would play music in that place. And just that spirit of ethnomusicology, of studying other people’s music, as Americans I think it’s kind of shameful how much people know about us and how little we know about them. (ibid.)

James Newton, one of the original Young Lions and a long-time collaborator with many musicians on the New Haven scene, gave Kamasi...
performed for years in Newton’s Luckman Jazz Orchestra) his blessing and words of advice, reported in a feature-length article in the *New York Times*:

“To have this group of men here for you: Do you realize how heavy that is? And do you realize that Art Tatum, Mingus, Eric Dolphy, Stravinsky and Schoenberg were all once living in a 20-mile radius, here in Los Angeles? Most of these things you know already, but now you’ve been put in the position of being a great hope. Don’t let your children become a casualty of your career or the industry. As Bennie [Maupin] said, “we’d all go to war for you.”” (Newton in Schatz 2016)

Washington, who performed with Tapscott before his passing, and was active in the Leimert Park scene that Tapscott and his Pan-Afrikan Peoples Arkestra used as a staging ground for many concerts, carries on the UGMAA tradition that Newton, Butch Morris and many others were a vital part of.

**ii. James Brandon Lewis**

Although James Brandon Lewis has musical ties to the Lower East Side creative music scene through his work with William Parker, his latest album, *Days of Freeman* (2015) on Sony’s Okeh imprint, focuses on the connections between hip-hop, creative music, and other Afro-diasporic forms. Lewis plays a remake on the album of Don Cherry’s “Bamako Love,” from Cherry’s hip-hop inspired 1985 album, *Home Boy (Sister Out)*, which Lewis claims as a major inspiration.

*Days of Freeman* is a very personal album, one that also forges a clear connection between jazz and hip-hop. It did not receive the kind of press and sales that Lewis thought that it should, despite the support of a major label. Lewis
describes the aesthetic that he was trying to present on the record as “gritty and raw,” not unlike the aesthetic of his earlier collaboration with William Parker and Gerald Cleaver. He relates: “Days of Freeman isn’t even as gritty and raw as I would like to be, quite frankly, it’s a little too polished. But what I will say is that [the grittiness and rawness of hip-hop] is basically the inspiration for that album” (James B. Lewis interview 2016). Lewis highlights the fact that his generation has grown up with and internalized hip-hop in a special way, stressing that despite the focus on projects that infuse hip-hop influences into jazz and creative music projects in 2015,

None of that is a trend. Let me start off by saying that. All of that is a by-product of our generation now being adults. You dig what I’m saying. So when we were kids, that music was going on, but we were naturally absorbing it, we didn’t have to learn it. So it really isn’t that difficult for our generation to be able to hear how to do that, because we were in it. I wasn’t a hip-hop head but because it was around me it was going in my subconscious. Your brain is cataloguing all of this information on a daily basis. (JB Lewis interview 2016)

In addition to using rhythmic and timbral devices associated with hip-hop, Lewis was also able to draw conceptually from that tradition. Lewis relates that like an MC (and unlike the majority of soloists in jazz and creative music), he wrote out solos to play in addition to writing specific parts for each composition. He recalls that this presented him with a unique challenge. Lewis describes extensively studying previous collaborations merging jazz and hip-hop, but even more importantly, he draws on the influence of Cherry, Lee Scratch Perry and other innovators of genre-crossing black music (JB Lewis interview 2016). Reviewers
recognized the ecumenical spirit of 1970s creative music groups, as well as his strategically-placed nods to his musical ancestors, citing the Art Ensemble of Chicago's motto:

Although some may find Lewis’ insistence on the connection between his music and hip-hop to be a bit overstated, his overall message is undeniable: As the AACM would put it, this is ‘Great Black Music: Ancient to the Future,’ and these musicians purvey it with integrity, grace and spirit. (Whiteis 2015)

Before Lewis moved to New York and began collaborating with William Parker (b. 1952), Pheeroan akLaff, Gerald Cleaver (b.1963) and others, he studied at CalArts with Wadada Leo Smith, studying creative music and maintaining an active interest in many world traditions. Lewis recalls that Smith stressed the importance of developing original approaches to both composition and improvisation.

We weren’t necessarily discussing his compositional systems but he was definitely exploring different ways for me to think about composition and different ways for me to think about playing saxophone. (ibid.)

He describes seeing in Smith the same wide-ranging interest in music that Gerry Hemingway noticed four decades earlier. Lewis was impressed by his trenchant analysis of the music of a wide range of artists, including some surprising ones.

I remember taking a class with him and we talked about Michael Jackson and down to what Michael Jackson was wearing, and what the message was behind all that. What was the message with his movements and even the different sound devices like: if you hear Mike on a recording and he sounds like he’s mumbling, that’s on purpose to get you to listen even closer to what he’s saying. So it was just very deep kind of things on a very accessible level. (ibid.)
In addition to his experiences playing experimental music in the African-American tradition, he also studied traditional Ewe drumming with Alfred Ladzekpo.

...some of the things that are natural for me now are definitely attributable to me being at CalArts in general. With or without taking the music of Ghana class, you can’t help but be influenced by all the different musics that are happening around the school. You’re gonna hear it, so it’s gonna be in your subconscious. But I definitely think that some of the different odd-metered things that I can feel quite naturally, and even some of my phrasing that I can feel and do naturally is definitely attributable to being around that music. I had to take that class to graduate, so I was definitely inspired by that. I also took shakuhachi for a semester so I definitely was exploring a lot of different things at CalArts, or trying to, not be stuck in my own mode or zone. So, definitely, all of it influenced me, it’s still influencing me, and there’s definitely a lot of information left to go to explore. So, I still have a lot of learning to do, a lot of stuff to explore that’s in notebooks. (ibid.)

James Newton was also a key figure in James Brandon Lewis’ development, urging him to go to New York to further develop his music. He recalls:

And then I also had a relationship with James Newton when I was at CalArts, because he was brought there as a guest lecturer, I think by Wadada, one time. It was either Wadada or Vinny (Golia) that brought him there. He was also brought there by a student, and me and him did a duo. We did a concert presenting our compositions. He presented his composition and I presented my composition. So I began a relationship with him and he encouraged me to go to New York based on the kind of things that I wanted to do, which is like playing creative music and just certain things that he heard in my playing. (JB Lewis interview 2016)

At the time, Lewis noted that one of the albums merging hip-hop and jazz
traditions was Steve Lehman’s *Sélébéyone* (2016), which he also acknowledged was a completely different kind of manifestation of the idea than his:

I think one of the albums that I’m super-excited about that’s coming out in the next couple months is not even anything related to my own stuff but Steve Lehman’s, that joint sounds fire. (ibid.)

iii. Steve Lehman

Steve Lehman, who studied with Anthony Braxton and Alvin Lucier (b.1931) at Wesleyan around the same time as Taylor Ho Bynum in the late 1990s and early 2000s, recently released *Sélébéyone* (2016) on Pi Records, documenting his own collaboration exploring the interstices of hip-hop and creative music traditions. Lehman’s embrace of the jazz tradition, Afrological and Eurological experimentalism, and contemporary African American popular music is in many ways firmly in the tradition of experimentation that many members of the New Haven scene were engaged in.

While the album is a landmark of sorts for Lehman, it is far from his first time incorporating the influence of hip-hop into his music. His cover of Wu-Tang member, the GZA’s, “Living in The World Today” on *Travail, Transformation, And Flow* (2009) is a classic post-sampler exercise in what Henry Louis Gates describes as “intertextuality” (1988). In that piece, which Amanda Scherbenske (2014) examines in some detail, Lehman transcribed the GZA’s samples (which are purposefully juxtaposed out of context in the original) and has the group play parts of the theme. Taking GZA’s concept of transforming source material in surprising ways and running with it, Lehman alters the basic cycle that the piece
is based on from the original 4/4 to a more complex rhythmic underpinning adding a 16th or 8th note every two bars in different places depending on the section of the piece (2 bars of 3/4+5/16 in the introduction, a bar of 5/16+2/4+5/16 to a bar of 5/16+5/16+2/4 during the second motif [Scherbenske 2014:188-190]).

Tyshawn Sorey, on drums, improvises what sounds like a through-composed beat using the idiomatic snare and high-hat fills exploited by hip-hop producers in surprising ways. On Sélébéyone, Lehman takes the influence of hip-hop to the next level using not only using rhythmic and compositional devices associated with the practice/genre, but emulating the sonic world of his favorite hip-hop tracks, a process that took a great deal of study on his part.

The album’s title emphasizes both intercultural collaboration as well as the idea of creating something unknown through the blending of composition and improvisation. “In Wolof, the word ‘sélébéyone’ refers to an intersection; a liminal terrain where two fixed entities meet and transform themselves into something heretofore unknown” (Lehman 2016). This idea has important resonances with Smith’s idea of “the creative music object,” which he describes as “a music-object whose significant moments are realized in the present” (Smith 1995: 93).

The album, which I had the privilege of hearing played live at Ohad Talmor’s house/venue Seeds (“Seeds:Brooklyn”), is also intended to bridge the gap between various cultural and musical expressions. Although perhaps the closest antecedent for Lehman’s album is Steve Coleman’s work with Metrics, a
group that augments his core ensemble with improvising lyricists, including Kokayi, Sub Zero, and Black Indian, Lehman seeks to position his work, at least in the promotional material, as the logical extension of Kamasi Washington's own work with Kendrick Lamar. He writes: “in some ways, Séléléyone delivers on the promise of Lamar’s more mainstream collaborations with contemporary jazz artists like Ambrose Akinmusire, Robert Glasper, and Kamasi Washington” (Lehman 2016). In addition to engaging with the American hip-hop tradition, Lehman’s record also features Senegalese MC Gaston Bandimic rhyming in Wolof, and incorporates influences from various African traditional musics. On a side note Lehman’s drummer Damion Reid is also a protégé of Billy Higgins, and a product of the same LA jazz scene that produced Kamasi Washington’s group.

Far more rhythmically complex than either Washington’s or Lewis’s albums, Lehman’s album draws on the rhythmic language that he has been developing since his time as a student of Anthony Braxton at Wesleyan and Jackie McLean in Hartford. While the rhythmic complexity and cyclic nature of his music has been rightly compared to the music of Steve Coleman, his use of complex subdivisions points to the influence of Braxton. The piece “Cognition” on Séléléyone is based around a cyclical pattern using quintuplets and interesting subdivisions in the rhythm section, one of Lehman’s signatures. While these subdivisions have been ubiquitous in contemporary classical music for well over 60 years, the way that Lehman uses them are reminiscent of Anthony Braxton’s

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61 See Fordham 2011, Collins 2013, Longley 2013
pulse tracks (see Lock 1988), forms that are based on through-composed rhythms instead of chord changes. They are also reminiscent of Braxton’s “Composition 169,” a piece that he has used as a rhythmic training “boot camp” for many years at Wesleyan.

After the main theme and improvisation on the cyclical form by the band, the quintuplet feel enters as the overarching rhythmic feel through a programmed drumbeat with a quintuplet subdivision in the hi-hat part. Using idiomatic gestures associated with “trap” music, (and its earlier manifestation, “crunk”), Lehman ups the ante of complexity while indexing a whole lineage of hip-hop music making. On the album, Lehman is able to bring in a multiplicity of influences from jazz and hip-hop and make a striking work that indexes a variety of traditions and approaches while remaining wholly original. Critics have praised the record for its ability to innovate while staying true to both traditions. Seth Colter Walls writes that the album

Walks the fine line stretched between fusion’s twin perils--too much accommodation of preexisting tastes (sic) the one side, too much invention on the other--and makes the unusual triumph look easy (Walls 2016)

The three records of Washington, Lewis, and Lehman all demonstrate the continued relevance of an approach to creative music that is influenced by world musics, contemporary black music, and avant-garde approaches to improvisation. The three records are also deeply rooted in an intertextual approach to African American music and point a new way forward for both jazz and hip-hop traditions.
Conclusion

The artists active in the 1970s New Haven and Creative Music Studio scenes have continued to be influential as composers, performers, and pedagogues. Their influence has penetrated into every sphere of creative music activity. Anthony Braxton at Wesleyan and Wadada Leo Smith at CalArts, now both in their 70s, would retire in 2014, paving the way for the next generation of creative musicians to take their place. Their spots were both filled by Wesleyan MA graduates and Braxton collaborators, Tyshawn Sorey and Steve Lehman, respectively.

Sorey and Lehman (who along with Vijay Iyer [b.1971] comprise the collaborative trio Fieldwork) both studied and performed with George Lewis as DMA students at Columbia. They are also profiled in Amanda Scherbenske’s (2014) dissertation, "Multiplicity and Belonging among New York City Improviser-Composers, 2000-2011," which focused on a generation of creative musicians born in the late 1970s, just as the musicians from the New Haven scene were making their way to New York.

Wadada Leo Smith, Anthony Braxton and other AACM artists who taught and collaborated with artists from the New Haven and CMS scenes, to some extent shut out of the mainstream of both the jazz and classical art worlds, have begun to garner awards and attention from both. Muhal Richard Abrams (1930-2017) became an NEA jazz master in 2010 and Anthony Braxton would receive the same distinction in 2014. In 2014 Wadada Leo Smith’s epic work Ten Freedom Summers, featuring Davis and akLaff, was nominated for a Pulitzer
Prize. Perhaps the ultimate institutional recognition for the AACM membership and movement would come in 2016 with Henry Threadgill's Pulitzer Prize awarded for the double-album, *In For a Penny, In For a Pound* (2015) on Pi Records. Threadgill became only the third living jazz-identified artist to win the prize after Wynton Marsalis and Ornette Coleman (Reich 2016). Threadgill feels that it marks a turning point for the award, especially because the album contains a lot more improvisation than much of his other work.

I'm happy that the Pulitzers' views have gotten broader, and seen fit to give me this award. Myself and others who have been working outside classical music — the rest of the artists in the United States, in North America, have been creating art for a long time, and sometimes it doesn't fall under the rubric of so-called classical music. Nonetheless, it is just as creative, and it is important. The Pulitzer Prize has made a major statement, in recognizing my work and others', that they have a bigger picture of creativity. (in Jarrenwattananon 2016)

George Lewis, Anthony Braxton, Anthony Davis, Wadada Leo Smith and others have all continued their compositional activity, and have inspired a younger generation to compose music that is influenced by the AACM focus on combining improvisation and composition. With the influence of the neo-conservative movement waning, the artists of the AACM as well as younger musicians who have followed in their footsteps have increasingly gained recognition and acceptance in jazz publications as well as to some extent in the world of Western art music.

It will be fascinating to witness the next generation of creative music composers and scholars, who learned in this mode from Anthony Braxton,
George Lewis, Wadada Leo Smith, and others enter the positions of their mentors as they retire in order to more fully engage with their musical practice.
Closing Thoughts

At the Society for Ethnomusicology’s annual meeting in 2017, I participated in an interview section/discussion with composer/improvisers Rajna Swaminathan (mrdangam) and Ganavya Doraiswamy (vocals), Carnatic-trained musicians who are both studying ways to incorporate African American improvised traditions into their music. As I listened to them describe their studies with Vijay Iyer in the newly created Cross-Disciplinary program at Harvard, I was reminded of the cross-cultural and intercultural music making of the New Haven and Woodstock scenes in the 1970s.

However, their narratives, which touched on their identities as South Asian women were also quite different from the largely male and Afro and Euro-American cohorts of the New Haven and Woodstock scenes. In many ways, their stories illustrate the changing demographics of creative musicians in the United States and the increasingly globalized nature of jazz and creative music. Their experiences as Carnatic-trained musicians who have begun to study jazz and Afrological experimental practices are a fascinating analogue to the stories of Wadada Leo Smith and other members of the New Haven and Woodstock scenes who incorporated Carnatic music and other world traditions into their music.

Recently, Harvard University, where both musicians are studying, has begun to further diversify their music program beyond its primary focus on Western classical music. In the past year there has been a sweeping change to Harvard’s music program in general. The school has adopted new guidelines for the undergraduate music program, doing away with requirements that demand
students take standard Western music theory and history courses (Robin 2017). While Harvard may be lagging in addressing these issues, this sea change in the music program is still noteworthy, if only because of the school’s prestige.62

Harvard isn’t the only Ivy League institution to recently address its historical lack of focus on jazz and creative music. In 2016 Princeton recruited Vijay Iyer’s frequent collaborator, saxophonist/composer Rudresh Mahanthappa to helm their jazz studies department, which was created in 2008 after a $4 million donation to the school by alumnus Anthony H.P. Lee (“$4 Million Gift from Alumnus Lee Will Strengthen Jazz Program”). Yale recently recruited New Haven-raised tenor saxophonist Wayne Escoffrey to teach at the university after criticism over their lack of a jazz program (Lutz 2015B, Brensilver 2016).63 The fact that academic institutions like Harvard are beginning to formally address the kind of cross-cultural, interdisciplinary approaches to composition and improvisation that the members of the New Haven and CMS scenes were engaged in in the 1970s illustrates the timeliness of this dissertation and the necessity for further investigation into how American institutions have (often informally) been sites of cross-cultural collaboration and new approaches to improvisation.

While the legacy of ethnomusicology in the American academy is certainly

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62 While the music program has only recently incorporated these new approaches and guidelines, Ingrid Monson, who has been at the forefront of innovative jazz scholarship, has been at the university since 2001. Ethnomusicology has also had a strong presence at the university since 1992 when Kay Shelemay joined the faculty.

63 However, Michael Veal has been an innovative influencer at Yale since 1998, recently teaching an ensemble focused around Butch Morris’ system of Conduction. This is, of course, in addition to Willie Ruff’s “Conservatory without Walls” program, which I address in Chapter 2.
complex, I hope that this dissertation leads to the acknowledgement of the impact of American ethnomusicology on creative music. Especially within institutions such as Wesleyan and UCLA whose programs were influenced by Mantle Hood’s “bimusicality” model, where performance was an integral part of study. Indeed, access to non-Western performance groups and master musicians was an important factor driving new approaches to creative music that began to address what Anthony Braxton would refer to as “composite reality.”

Recently, while I was driving in NYC listening to Morning Edition on NPR, the participants were discussing the work of the recently deceased author Ursula LeGuin. One of the discussants, Petra Mayer, noted that her exposure to anthropology through the work of her father, anthropologist A.L. Krober, who studied with Franz Boas, gave her a unique perspective and influenced her science-fiction writing (Mayer 2018). Mayer noted that her studies of how human cultures function allowed her to create new worlds from a completely new perspective, taking nothing for granted. As Anthropologist Philip W. Scher points out, “the point of her imagined universes was precisely to show that nothing human was universal, and that what was ‘alien’ was only a matter of perspective” (Scher 2018).

In much the same way, for many of the musicians profiled in this dissertation, their study of musics from around the world have allowed them to create new systems for creating musical worlds that rely on unorthodox rules. Far from simply internalizing the music that they were studying, they studied the mechanics of the music and in many cases the philosophy behind the music. The
musicians of the New Haven school and CMS artists, Wadada Leo Smith, Anthony Braxton, and Don Cherry in particular, were able to take their studies of these music cultures and use them as templates to create new systems and languages. Smith’s recounting of how he was influenced to create Ankhraasmation, a musical system based on symbols, after reading Marcel Griaulle’s *Conversations with Ogotemmeli* is but one example of how musicians studying the philosophy and music of diverse cultures has impacted the history of creative music.\(^{64}\)

This study, which details the engagement of American creative musicians with world musics in formal and informal situations, shows how these encounters allowed these musicians to access new inspirations. I provide a counter narrative to the many accounts of how jazz conservatories have had a homogenizing effect on the music. I also provide a window into how musicians have used the inspiration from their studies to create new musical concepts.

A musician that I spoke to off the record during my research expressed the opinion that the work of the New Haven cohort had been passed over and that the continuity between their work and the experimentalism of the current generation of creative musicians has gone largely unnoticed. Hopefully this dissertation begins to shed light on the roots of the intercultural and interdisciplinary programs that many have begun to cultivate within a university framework.

It is striking how many of the musicians that participated in the New

\(^{64}\) see page 99
Haven scene and CMS have become educators. I have mostly focused on the pedagogical activities of Wadada Leo Smith and Anthony Braxton. However, Gerry Hemingway, Pheeroan akLaff, Jay Hoggard, and the majority of the musicians of the New Haven cohort (and many of the teaching artists of the CMS) have become professors at universities throughout the US (and Europe). The New Haven and CMS artists, many of whom began their studies with strongly anti-authoritarian views are, in many cases, now in positions of power at academic institutions across the country. Accordingly, this dissertation begins to answer Ajay Heble’s call for “more research on the vital pedagogical rule played by ‘famous’ jazz artists of the free jazz movement” (Heble 2013:20).

This dissertation also provides a more geographically expansive view of the activities of the loft era, examining the relationship of both the New Haven scene and CMS artists in Woodstock with the New York loft scene. In dialogue with the work of Michael Heller and George Lewis, I explore the end of the loft scene and how it affected the musical aesthetics of African American experimentalism during that period. I also investigate the struggles during the post-loft period in the 1980s to define both the future and history of jazz and creative music, examining the place of the New Haven cohort in larger struggles in the jazz and classical art worlds of New York City during the highly-charged political atmosphere of the Reagan Era. This has allowed me to add a new perspective to the history of this turbulent time period in jazz and creative music.

There are signs that we are entering an era where more experimental approaches are beginning to be celebrated as intrinsic to the fabric of modern
jazz. Giovanni Russonello writes in a recent piece on musicians active in the downtown New York scene that:

their history feels newly relevant. The downtown scene, centered in Soho and the Lower East Side, where rents were stable but the streets weren’t always safe, grew out of many things: punk rock, salsa, loft jazz, Manhattan’s waning big band tradition, Off Off Broadway, radical poetry. Nowadays, neo-classicism in jazz appears to have played itself out; interchange and overflow are understood as inherent to making creative music. (Russonello 2017)

Perhaps, most importantly, this dissertation functions as a corrective to the many jazz histories that are either unaware of, or ignore this historical moment and its continued importance. I suggest that far from leading to a dead end, as the era is presented in some jazz histories noted by Porter (2010), the experimentation that these musicians began in the 1970s has continued to influence musical production in important ways until the present era. Porter writes that, “despite instances of historiographical erasure and marginalization, there was a lot of interesting jazz-related music created during the decade. And this music, and the extra-musical activities that accompanied it, continue to influence the music world” (Porter 2010:2). Hopefully this dissertation, following the lives and work of musicians whose artistic formation began in the 1970s, shines new light on the specific ways that the musical experimentation of the period has continued to influence present day musical production.

By situating my dissertation around two intertwined networks of composer/improvisers, rather than around the concept of genre or musical approach, I, following Piekut and Dessen, take an ethnographic approach to
experimentalism that looks at the development of innovative approaches to music through a series of interpersonal relationships. Exploring these expanding networks has allowed me to understand the historical importance of both of these scenes to the present day creative music landscape in a way that other approaches may have denied.

Situating the Jazz Composers Orchestra Institute, the Tri-Centric Orchestra, and the projects of Kamasi Washington, James Brandon Lewis, and Steve Lehman within this larger continuum of creativity shows the diversity of approaches that this orientation toward musical creativity has produced in recent years. Focusing on this continuum, I address Anthony Braxton’s criticism that “one of the most basic distortions that have come to permeate black creative music is the notion that every given thrust extension must necessarily represent a breakage in the composite identity of the music” (Braxton 1985:240).

I continue to be excited by the wealth of approaches informed by the experimentation of the 1970s and continue to be inspired by my own study of many musical traditions and conceptual approaches. My own experiences at Wesleyan, as a performer, composer, and improviser have had a considerable impact on my own thinking in this dissertation. I am grateful to all of the people that I have met throughout the work on this dissertation, and look forward to continuing to explore “the composite identity of the music,” through scholarship, composition and performance.
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