

William C. Banfield

ETHNOMUSICOLOGIZING

ESSAYS ON MUSIC IN THE NEW PARADIGMS



Ethnomusicologizing

African American Cultural Theory and Heritage

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Essays on Music in the New Paradigms

William C. Banfield

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We are all shaped by mentors. This book is dedicated to my living current mentors who inspire, fuss, push, and challenge me to think and work more critically. Their present and very recent encouragement made this book possible.

Thank you, Amiri Baraka (passed in 2014), T. J. Anderson, David Baker, Raelinda Brown, Kenny Burrell, Patrice Rushen, George Duke (passed in 2013), Cornel West, Bill Ferris, Quincy Jones, Dr. Ysaye Barnwell, Stanley Crouch, Mari Evans, Yusef Koomanyakaa, Robin Kelley, John Wright, Leonard Brown, Cliff Weeks, Richard Evans, Lenny White.

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A NOTE OF DEFINITION

Ethnomusicologizing is . . .

[I]t is indeed the ethnomusicologist who is especially interested in what has happened in the world of music at large . . . who takes a broad view of the concept of change and who wishes to know what types of things happened under various conditions in which cultures find themselves in the twentieth century, and particularly in the ways in which various types of intercultural relationships affect music. If there is a methodology, . . . it must, it seems to me, revolve around these five characteristics of the field:

1. The interest in cultural universals, and infinite variety
2. The emphasis on field work
3. Exploring music, visually and verbally [add, aurally]
4. Understanding cultural context
5. An interest in processes

This configuration of approaches constitute the essence of ethnomusicology.

—*Bruno Nettl*, “Ethnomusicology:
Definitions, Directions, and Problems”

* * *

Ethnomusicologizing contains writings on contemporary music and culture studies, creative glimpses on history through reflective essays, interviews with contemporary artists, perspectives on popular culture analysis, and criticism. It engages in a way that allows all to better appreciate and

A NOTE OF DEFINITION

understand creative artistry, process, history, and its meaning and application. It is a choir of voices and perspectives that provide insights into contemporary music culture. This is a reader/text that draws on travels and culture analysis from Cuba, discussions on contemporary popular recording artists, American music traditions, teaching pedagogy and approaches, lists of resources, and compelling interviews about every aspect of creating, performing, and being in music/arts from a pointedly useable wide reach. Ethnomusicologizing encourages artists to talk about the meaning of their work inside the biting and inspiring issues that drive our culture today. Ethnomusicologizing is for teaching, general informative reading, and a contemporary creative musician/artists' book.

PRELUDE

Keeping the Core Creative Spirit-Soul

The reason I wrote these books (a trilogy: *Cultural Codes, Representing Black Music Culture: Then, Now, and When Again, Ethnomusicologizing*) was to talk about music from several angles. I realize that many of us may be the last generation of musicians/teachers born into a creative musical culture where music was largely produced in the marketplace, as music. I meant that—although perhaps it is debatable—too much of today’s music is produced in the marketplace as a purely commoditized device to sell stuff or to be “pop,” and it’s programmed by marketers who use music only as a front for doing other things. They take people like Justin Bieber, Britney Spears, or rappers who aren’t really musicians or saying anything—or rap music taken out of context—just to sell a new candy, car, clothes, purse, or fruit juice. Many feel today’s “post-album age” culture of downloads, YouTube, and Internet, in ways, is eroding parts of the traditional creative base of our culture. It does this by substituting a commoditized, constructed product and offering up a messy, market-saturated monster known as “popular culture” today. Some of this is generational and merited, and properly evolutionary. But far too much of it is the result of greed and the insidious support of on-demand commercialism that powerfully defines our purchase needs, aesthetics, cultural politics, and our very identity as modern beings. These entities (TV reality shows, *American Idol*, Justin Bieber, Britney Spears, Facebook, and so on) are constructed within the guise of popularity and, in some cases, technological innovations. We do benefit from these extremely powerful electronic tools. However, as this all relates specifically to human spiritual matters, some of the things of today connected to our industries are increasingly becoming the kiss of death because they are based on false premises and the promise of profit by demand in numbers.

PRELUDE

For the arts, that is always the kiss of death: death of quality, skills, value of human expression, individuality, creative innovation, and a lack of spirit-soul. That spirit-soul is an intelligence not manufactured in the marketplace but is the real driving force for creative, artistic people and their expressive products in the classic arts and humanities.

The uniqueness of this community of creatives and the value of their work is muted by what is visible and “quick sold” on television, as is a pop market identity that must be valued and voted upon by millions of buyers. We have to understand that it not only takes training, craft, and purpose of mind to be engaged in these things, it also takes time. Art is never made solely by the demands of a TV market; instead, art is the workings of a dedicated core of creative people who are more invested in the meaning of their expressive work than popularity or financial gain. There is nothing old-fashioned about this kind of core group of arts and humanities seat-holders, but there is a fight we have right now to hold our ground, in the face of the suffocating, pervasive, and all-permeating mass media monster that operates solely on greed.

And so, what must be done for this true arts/humanities core? The challenge, a call to artistic action, is to make this way of being culturally relevant—not because of a need to compete but to contribute.

That contribution is evident throughout history in the way great creative arts have brought us here. There were different kinds of criteria, causations, and contributing factors that brought all that evolutionary great “stuff” to us, and very little of it was based solely on market demand or sales profits. And so that is our conversation, our challenge, and our charge: to maintain and sustain our creative core, a base of operations, and to continuously train and empower younger people to become artistic by the high standards of “artistry, not enterprise”—and to continuously create the workings and ideas that foster the oxygen of the creative core, to turn out quality expressions that matter and move people, and always, always maintain that creative spirit-soul.

Part I
THEORY
Aesthetic Theories,
Teaching, and Approaches

CHAPTER ONE

ETHNOMUSICOLOGIZING AND CULTURAL RELEVANCY

Every artist must decide now where he/she stands.

—Paul Robeson, *Here I Stand*

Ethnomusicologizing Definitions of Thought

This book is a collection of essays on music making in contemporary culture. It focuses on an approach to being involved in music I call *ethnomusicologizing*. My purpose here is to explore ways of creating, sharing, and teaching, to discuss music as more than a sound, and to examine a way of being more critically present as musicians and as citizens sharing a musical culture.

I'm interested in when people make music and create art, how they do it, how it relates and connects, and how—when it's being done—it provides a sustainable expression that is reflective of, and vital to, our society. My last book, *Representing Black Music Culture* (2011), was a memoir that focused on a generation of Black musicians and the musical results of their cultural and historical landscape. A previous book, *Cultural Codes* (2009), formulated a philosophy of Black music activity as a way of appreciating the depth and relevance of Black artistry and the artistic engagement of historical influences, from West African song to hip-hop.

This book, following *Representing*, focuses specifically upon creating and teaching music, art, and culture as ways to better the world we live in today.

Musicology has traditionally been a history study. Ethnomusicology began as the study of the history of a people and their ways of and reasons for making music. Ethnomusicology today has broadened in its subject matter, but traditional scholarly discussions, the common musician, and

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common people rarely meet in a text. This text attempts to draw from and address communities of readers who love music. It's also meant to serve as a text for ethnomusicologists and musicians as a look at music making in the world and what that could mean moving forward.

It's time for artists and humanitarians to stand up together and demand more from the world we live in and to work harder to make a difference.

Ethnomusicologizing is the context for the arts' purpose, social/cultural development, citizenship, and local/global applications.

Our practices in music, the arts, and education must meet the demands and needs of the world we live in, in ways that are practical, meaningful, and relevant. Artists must continually bring their professional experience to meet the new challenges in music, the arts, performance, and education.

What would a holistic approach to teaching, creating, exploring, exchanging, and performing that unified music and the arts look like, especially if it were sustainable beyond mere market penetration? I call such an idea "ethnomusicologizing." Borrowing that discipline name from musicology but asking, if we were active in music, what would provide us with music/culture action that was meaningful? These essays are all wrapped in cultural studies, art and music criticism, music pedagogy, and examining music, arts, society, technology, and the general term of cultural relevancy. How do things really matter to us today and why? These ideas are connective to discussions on living in our world and raising our business, technology, and industry acumen for change—but highly favorable and held visible to music's ears, art's eyes, dancers' moves, and poets' rhetoric and reasoning.

Ethnomusicologizing is dealing in music culture, framed in a people-centered way. It's a reciprocal analysis, an exploration, a creative forward dialogue—a kind of cover-all approach to contemporary music teaching—and a creative conceptual framework. People need a sidewalk to keep them headed up the road without getting hit by stray cars. I believe there simply has to be better and more directed conversations about concrete creativity—what it means from us as creative people and as folks who look toward human vision every day from education, the arts, and humanities. Although contemporary music is the principal focus, this is an interdisciplinary inquiry within culture about being and living.

As I did in *Representing Black Music Culture*, I present active reflective pieces here, interviews, essays, and a moving log of ideas in real cultural time. “What you gonna do with that gift, that call on your life?” asks Boston pastor/activist Rev. Ray Hammond from his pulpit. I study and watch all the people that I admire as they look at music as a through-line, their art-life existence, ritual, a history, cultural voice, their faith, ministry toward people, a deeply engaged endeavor, and a life commitment and pursuit. They die for their music and die in it. So these pieces are an attempt to further foster a productive dialogue among creative people, educators, and interested readers as we together address our communities and inspire each other to effectively keep the music and the arts coming.

What if the musicians had a book that they all referred to, like Leroy Jones’s *Blues People*, or Cornel West’s *Race Matters*, a book that everybody was reading and, through it, relating about music culture? I suggest that musicians extend the “standard” frameworks and take time in our music making to connect more critically.

I think this applies to being a historian, composer, educator, and songwriter, and I think it applies equally to a musician, producer, performer, and artist sharing in a performance that is now enhanced beyond entertainment yet includes real engagement with ideas that connect more deeply. That makes the song better, the performance richer, the music better, and the people happier and more sustained. Most of us who make music, think it, teach it, find ourselves locked in tussles between the two worlds of the beat on the street and the meaning of what matters in the mind, as well as the expression of musical artists bridging these two worlds. The communities musicians come from are crucial, because a musician’s work reflects the impulse, tastes, desires, and worldviews of everyday folks.

After you study music/culture, you can’t help being taken by the way in which the music transformed people’s thinking about human meaning and being. You see how people lived in different ways as the music went through them, how music brought whole communities to different ways of knowing about the world by changing perceptions and altering the way living could be done. The musicians themselves become another elevated type of human personality, because their expressions gave them a hold and a take on what the value of expression really meant. These expressions communicated sounds, feelings, and ideas that then brought inspiration, happiness, and connection, and solved the dilemma of broken identity.

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In January 2013, I returned from Switzerland a renewed music citizen. I could once again answer my own questions about how far the language of music goes, how it comes back to you and then is sent out again. From snow-filled and beautiful (of course) Delemont, Switzerland, two hours north of Geneva near the borders of France and Germany, nestled in the Jura Mountain chain, I wrote to friends about the experience.

Swiss conductor Blaise Héritier had commissioned a new song symphony from me. His 35-member voiced brass/percussion band and 80-voice choir rehearsed for many weeks in dedicated perfection. Every detail of the music was accounted for. But what got me was the people.

Their dedication and commitment were demonstrated by actions of the choir members, taking buses for three hours to the rehearsals, asking questions about interpretive issues with the text, inviting us to meals at homes, and providing drivers to get us into towns. The performances of the work were stellar, almost angelic, but again committed, singing with passion. And the brass orchestra and percussion played the music beyond the page.

And for five nightly performances, the people of these communities came out, jam-packed the concert venues to hear the new music performed and sung by their local orchestra and chorus—people they knew, believed in, and valued. So I asked myself after each performance: What was it in their preparation and how did they see themselves in music that created such a passionate, expertly executed performance? This was my first trip to Europe. That singing energized my soul, because it came from singers connected to their soul, soil, and singing, and playing freely because of their national, cultural love of music. And it is in this context one realizes why music must always be done—to connect with people.

This trip had already changed me. Not just because of the global travel and exposure, and not just because I was being dealt with strictly on my musical meaning, but also because of what I was learning about humans sounding in the world. We are only a drop of dew on the side of a very huge mountain of waterfalls of meaning, vastly more wet than we are, and yet each of us is made all the more resonate in all kinds of noteworthy noisemaking when you hear your voice clearly in the larger human choir. I want to sing in those choirs.

Of all the spiritual-writing projects from the pen, these essays most embody all that I believe and have a passion for, and answer my own ques-

tions about the joy and meaning of being a creative person in the modern world. What this particular journey has allowed me to do is to frame active creativity/teaching in new ways as we move from the contemporary and go forward.

Because we enter into this engagement with such dedication, and fueled by great visions, this impregnates ideas with unique missions that rip through pages.

This is critically important! When a young teacher or student reads about Bessie Smith or Woody Guthrie, he or she will see “music meaning” in a different way, and that new way might inspire that young person to create the next songs. Traditions are based on “that kind of music,” not on the vapid and selfish, self-glorifying, titillating, puff stuff that drives the market today. Those “traditional” new songs are the kinds of songs, or innovative art ideas, that move people and change the world. As Margaret Mead, American anthropologist, reminded us, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Many of us feel that the market pressure to “sell, sell a fast product for a buck and a flash” has helped to take the specialness out of music and the arts and turned all into just spectacle. It’s so seriously that way that when you talk about rebooting the sanity of culture, people look at you like you are some kind of throwback to the ’70s. I say always that the line “back in the day” should stay, because some of that we want back, especially when we are reminded of those kinds of committed ideas. In reading these essays, there is a theory and practice of ethnomusicology present, one I call ethnomusicologizing. Here are some important questions that are raised relative to our connective history, culture, and education, and our explorations.

At the end of each of these essays are some helpful reflective summaries, and a few theme/terms for closure of each.

Let’s be clear and honest: Attempting to write a reflective text that aims to speak to contemporary issues and approaches to music culture and education—and serve a larger musician and general reading community—is challenging. That’s compounded with trying to speak about popular culture, technology, styles, and trends that change every 26 hours. It’s impossible to chain, restrain, or explain contemporary culture while it’s moving so rapidly in all directions.

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In trying to make sense of what I mean by ethnomusicologizing, the reasons why or how this would be helpful, who it is relevant for, who the audience is, and why this would be any different from what's been already said before, I try and speak like a musician who cares about the music. Although contemporary music is the principal focus, this is an interdisciplinary inquiry within a study of culture.

The thing that brings some peace and calm to that storm of questions about the usefulness and purpose of one's book is the dynamic inclusion of all the young artistic voices, of those who have questions, inquiries, quests, and their own battles in and with contemporary culture. These discussions with contemporary, practicing musicians from communities all around the world—China, Cuba, Africa, London, Mississippi, Israel, the Fiji Islands, and Brooklyn—is that they share a disdain for any corporate, media-controlled entity that tries to control or constrain their artistic identities. This is a global artistic concern. A positive confluence of identities in these times is a good thing due to the availability and access of technology, and the global discourse possible through that medium.

There is joy because that technology and the rise of the information highway opens more doors, bursts down more divides, and provides an antidote to the poison of the controlling market-bred channels the traditional industry provided. So now the consolidation and crossovers are in places that allow travel over these divides and bring all together, through the Internet, through discussions, and putting creative product out there. In my mind, this is what this is about: It's dialogue across cultural, generational, and philosophical lines. In general, we need to have more discussions about how we are being in the world as people sharing and doing together—a wider, deeper, yet closer dialogue going on among creative people. That's the only way really to be a creative, to be human, and to breathe fully in the world. None of this is a whine fest; it's a working fest. In this way, much of the traditions that W.E.B. Du Bois, Franz Boas, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Margaret Mead gave us to report on the culture create from it and lift it up for others to be inspired—these are our great example to uphold. Cultural reporting is essential, because it is the measure and the example of how we live in our world.

Three Concepts of Thought: Cultural Relevancy, Generational Cultural Transfer, and Cultural Context

For us the questions should be, what are the specific forms of that humanity, and what in our backgrounds is worth preserving or abandoning . . . folklore. . . . [It] offers the first drawings of any group's character. . . . It describes those rites, manners, customs, and so forth, which insure the good life, or destroy it. It describes those boundaries of feeling, thought and action which that particular group projected this wisdom in symbols which express the group's will to survive, it embodies those values by which the group lives and dies . . . they represent the group's attempt to humanize the world.

—Ralph Ellison, “The Art of Fiction,” *Shadow and Act*

These ideas have actually been formulated finally in this, the third of three books: *Cultural Codes, Representing Black Music Culture*, and here, *Ethnomusicologizing*.

In *Cultural Codes* (2009), I argued that artists, for the most part, participate consciously in construing and creating art, music, dance, visuals that are filled with agreed-upon values for identity, beauty, what's hip, and what's loved.

A culture, a society, is helped and informed by those values as well. That's what popular music is all about. I talked about banner songs, like Bob Dylan's “Times They Are a-Changin’,” where it is clear that the message of the times is contained in the songs, and the popular priests—the artists—lead the song.

In *Representing*, I spoke more about the role of my generation in strongly upholding and projecting protected values of excellence based on what specific times thrust upon us, and we consciously held onto that role and responsibility. Two important ideas we use here came out of that book: *generational transfer* and *cultural context*. Here in this series of essays, the most dominant of these is *cultural relevancy*. I think there is a broader sweep, a wider range of motion, in *Ethnomusicologizing*.

It's important—and not for academic reasons—to take hold of the idea of what music is as a language of human experience and what it means, because music holds so much and is so much. I have in recent

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years claimed that it is equally important to be a great musician and to have a good grasp on the knowledge of musical styles and movements, to be able to hear music within the traditions of many music practices. You have to listen to music to understand it and get it deep within you, within your very soul. People used to be much more “serious” about their music.

I began this inquiry of art and cultural exploration/experiencing, then creating, as a Youth for Cultural Understanding (YFU) exchange student in 1978. My chosen country was Mexico.

I went there as a foreign exchange student to study guitar and Mexican culture. I remember very well I chose Mexico *because* I wanted to study the guitar. Immediately I had to learn the language. I had to live among the people, to walk on their streets. I had to learn the songs and the rituals of the community, to hang with foods, song, and dance. I remember vividly my exchange mother, Señora Bergeret, whose mama died. They kept the body in the house, placed right outside my bedroom door, for viewing for a week. I learned culture.

We ate a huge meal at lunchtime and I fell in love with guacamole and Spanish-speaking women for life. I learned to love the culture. I had to live the language and the music, and I loved learning about people. My fourth symphony, *Streams of Consciousness*, was built around melodies recorded and collected by a dear friend and musicologist from the South American village of Mecana on the Pacific coast of Colombia. The songs were the foundation of the entire symphony, and melodies and lessons from both cultures have remained with me in many ways until today.

We have all seen the cultural consciousness and technological paradigm shifts from the 1990s to current times. They were fast and sweeping. Many things have shifted, and the big one for me is cultural relevance. The most important thing we have to do today is to be with each other in community. By having the privilege and joy to be with people, to share ideas in that engaging, loving, critical, and caring place, our lives are enriched and our world is made better.

Cultural relevance is both an understanding of what we as individuals value and what is held up and valued by the culture we live within.

There is the spirit-soul fight to be an individual creative person in today’s world, mostly defined by commodities. And this struggle is a fight that recording engineer Prince Charles Alexander says, “we have already lost.” That fight is the legal battle and the ethics around technology, what

it allows you to command to be with a push of a fast button, and the ownership of intellectual properties. The Protect IP Act (PIPA), Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA), and Internet Fairness Acts are battlegrounds where it's about the rights of technology to exist up against the rights of creative music makers to protect their creative ideas/space, or to be paid fairly and compensated when the technology and media rip us off. As my friend says,

This generation has access to the greatest information given to a generation, but it all looks the same because these people are walking around with stuff, but no real lived discriminating wisdom about how all this is to serve us. It's like those commercials where the two kids are listening to music, and they switch earphones. One kid hears Miles Davis and says, "Hey what's this?" and the other one answers, "Oh that's 'My Music.'"

Really? So Miles's artistry is minimized, but the product that "holds" Miles, allows Miles to become "yours," is now more important? We have allowed them to steal our music, using the power of accessible technology that you can buy, but this power dismantles and devalues creative artistry and minimizes the ability of the musician to make a living.

Music is a "cool thing" to have, so they (marketplace, industries) "money-itize" everything they can and collect their cash. How have we gotten to the point where music means nothing but something you can purchase and attach it to yourself to mean it's "you" because you bought it? So many identities today are constructed, sold, and bought to be somebody and something else. Of course, the problem is we are saturated and somebody else also bought that something. Now we cut and paste it, copy that, mash-up and model this and that, and perhaps lose lots of human individuality in this wild, fluent, and fast-pick mine process. This is where our fight is. This is the decoding of what market relevancy is and the re-tooling of how such an idea can repower and infuse our work in ways that marks the new work with artistic distinction. This is an important debate to be having right now.

Cultural Relevancy

Real stories are the best songs. You see the scene, you write that narrative You have to go with your gut, you have to have a knack for hearing the pulse of

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the marketplace. We had the pulse of the world and we took full advantage of the situation, we were involved with all aspects, we used the same musicians, so we created a chemistry in our sound.

—Producers Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff

Cultural relevancy becomes, in my way of thinking, the most essential survival idea that impacts and determines the value of our work as artists. Your creative work will live or be suffocated under that dry and market-spun term—yet it remains the challenging question for us at the beginning and end of our days.

This kind of evaluation of art comes about in a time when music is being reduced to a commoditized idea. In these writings I call ethnomusicologizing, I have proposed we share ideas with anyone interested in a discussion and approach to keeping our music traditions relevant. It's folly to think we only live in a world for politics, policy, and cultivating the party and the play. In our workings, we think too about creating, reporting, sharing, and inspiring folks further.

One could argue that art proves its own relevancy: If it's of value, it remains—its currency, its relevancy, endures. As avant-garde composer and pianist Donal Fox states, "Artists must always be true only to themselves. Chasing a paradigm for the sake of chasing a paradigm is a treacherous and false design. We perform the music and sounds that we like, whether it is fashionable or not." That's true of a Beethoven symphony, a Picasso, a Miles Davis solo, a Maya Angelou poem reading, or a James Taylor classic. But we wonder today, as the codes have shifted and definitions have been rewritten, if maybe it's not true anymore.

So for your artistry you need to assess the cultural context you live in or you wait on someone to discover that what you are doing matters. Greatness is always measured by great intent. I've never heard of an innovative artist who was not conscious of the merits of his or her own actions. This says to me they are aware of their impact, their relevance.

I'm only suggesting that people connect with an expression that connects with their experiences, and making art requires even the most gifted artist to be aware of the impulses of his time, no matter the size of the gulf that exists between artistic expression and the slowed ear of the common neighbor. We are in a moment of needed exchange between artists and a commodity-saturated general public, so we have to step up and connect.

ETHNOMUSICOLOGIZING AND CULTURAL RELEVANCY

How does this become approachable and applicable to what others do? Why should anyone care? How is relevancy categorized? We could think about two kinds of relevancy.

1. *Long-term cultural relevancy (cultural historical)*. Looking at what kinds of cultural and historical expressive art has survived and impacted people. Folk songs, the blues, ballet, quilting, an art piece, poetry—these things were meant to be loved by people repeatedly, having these expressions in their lives, because they grew out of the lives of people and reflected that human experience. These things have appreciated cultural value and meaning, not in the short run but over the long term.
2. *Market relevancy, manufactured relevancy (creating needs, sales rationale)*. Clearly, what sells is what is liked, beloved by people because it has been sold to them by an enterprise, business, and marketing idea that sells things to the people.

There is a present market demand. I think we have to think about the product as something that is either constructed simply for sales or something that grows out the people's need to have things that reflect their everyday lives. In this way, popular music could be actually a very healthy arts expression to be a part of. But somebody has to be "in there" with and for the common everyday person to be met. So I don't think market relevance is evil; in fact, I think our expressions have to have a bit of both long-term relevance and manufactured relevance.

Somehow we need to move our music/arts talk out of the "specialized" category of endangered species and create a "marketable buzz" around creative talks and enterprises—like Oprah's Book Club, which made reading a cool thing to do.

This is a disciplinary-specific endeavor, but talk among artists, educators, and thinkers carries over to younger people who train on this way of thinking, and those younger people carry that enthusiasm into the marketplace. This is the only way, or we will be too far from the interests or reach of people. This is not intended to downsize or popularize serious craft or innovation or traditions but to, in fact "talk up" what this is in a way that is marketable, palatable, and penetrates and interests younger people and general consumers. I really believe the industry has

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dumbed-down tradition, craft, and integrity to such an extent that people really don't know any better and therefore don't care for anything better or higher. The idea here is that artists and thinkers have to do a better job at making creative investigation, preparation, and music/arts creation more relevant and of interest in our mainstream culture. That's where the people are who need us.

Every generation, every new style era, faces the same dilemma it seems. What to do with the new without scolding the old? Today, we too are concerned about the "allegiance shift among younger artists," younger people in general. There seems to be more faith in market-driven ideas of success, and there are many TV/media and reality shows that are defining this: *The Voice* or *Survivor* or *Apprentice* . . . just the way the whole popular media apparatus is framing our realities is questionable, and unfortunately their framing is tilting our best efforts with younger, impressionable adults toward newer sets of problematic faith stances and worldviews.

Most of this is essential and expected, but we fear, also, this current market's definitions. And so we go back and forth to navigate many of these questions.

We debate what a tried-and-true track of history or artistry or definitions and expectations have been against—in many ways, a whole new set of conveniences and what seems like essentials to survive in this techno, informational, new landscape.

It's challenging. We are all, two and three and sometimes even four functional generations, figuring out in 2015 and beyond what to do to draw the necessary lines in a cultural milieu that is fast changing.

Cuban composer Denis Peralta put it to me this way. "But we have a problem: the global situation, the globalization and the power of the media. The interest for the fine arts and the art of creation is going down, down. It's because of the press of the media, which is giving more importance to commercial products, which we know is not well done, some poor constructed products. These become famous. But they are not doing anything new, it just sells well. And that happens here!" Or as my Swiss friend and conductor shared with me, "Yes, we don't want these things in our culture, but the kids want the hamburgers."

People don't need another reality show or TV commercial selling more stuff. I have begun to direct people "back" toward richer materials.

So if you are doing contemporary classical music, you can't do your new work and escape the search through Beethoven or Ravel. If you were doing jazz or popular music, you would have to rip into Miles Davis, Donny Hathaway, or Carole King. If it's writing, Hemmingway to Zora Neale Hurston to Saul Williams. But you must look back into the deep archives of great literature.

That's the only way a new voice is relevant. It is primarily relevant in art when it is in creative resonance and in response as it stands in the line within the future path forward of great work that came before. Every artist stands on the higher ground of work done by others who came before. That's just real.

Cultural Transfer

Another fundamentally important idea is generational cultural transfer. Each generation in every culture must determine its own cultural codes, those living elements, values, and constructions of identity that define the codes. But that happens by a generational handoff, so that each successive new group experiences the wisdom and the values of the past, and each current group participates in the realization of its role and responsibility to ensure meaningful values are handed off to the even younger generation. Value construction and carrying is huge. It ensures that culture is seeded and carried on, and it is vital to community building, family bonds, and the creation of sustained art, song, dance, poetry, story, and narrative in lyric.

Especially in the arts and education, we have seen a dramatic shift in value construction due to the pervasiveness of mega-commercial culture.

Traditional structures that shaped identity like the church, family, and community—which used to be the main places these things were developed—have been seriously disrupted. This becomes a huge area of discussion by exploring what expressions, rituals, and ideas mean in communities, and a principal area for analysis of meaning is in popular culture forms—love it or leave it. We must deal with popular culture projected globally.

Yet another idea that threads through these discussions of approach is *cultural context*. What time do we live in? What are the popular ideas and values? What's the date? What and how do the people in a community

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value things? What are the languages, codes, symbols, sayings, clothes? What are the underlying things that drive the people's imagination at a specific time?

What is the zeitgeist, the "shaping force and spirit of the times"?

These are all considerations of the cultural context, in which meaning, experience, expression, and understanding are truly cemented. In music and arts, cultural context is everything.

It establishes many of the parameters that define how artists not only see themselves but also develop the legs to stand on to walk forward and claim the identity of artistry. It explains the support mechanisms from the creative, cultural, and business sides.

In this way, particularly in a specific period, this becomes a gift for inquiry. There is much information about what these times provide for artists in training, and then for what working musicians are able to produce, and the evidence of these workings can be seen in the newspapers, playbills, clippings, and recordings. At the end of our discussion, what we mean to say by "creating long-term cultural conscious relevance" is to evaluate the degree to which people consciously reach an understanding of their spaces, in meanings and experience, in benefit, in time, and that they are good with this. Art can be newly created that is cognizant of this placement in culture.

Cultural Relevancy as a Human Matter

In our busy-ness, I've been deeply concerned about what, at the end of the day, matters, what is relevant. The human story side of what I've been thinking about and working through in terms of the idea of relevancy looks not at market forces only but at what our human codes are. This is about cultural exploration as a way to provide a deeper examination of the larger world we live in, with an emphasis on the ideas of "diverse voices" in and around arts and creative agency. As a kid, I was always put "on point" when I read the words "In the beginning God *created*." Being a "creative" is an act of thinking relative to motion in and of this world we live in, and we share this world with other humans. This, again, is the role of a conduit, a cultural explorer.

Cultural relevancy and cultural context drive these discussions on many levels. Music, arts, and creative agency as expression is the language of humanization.

The educational value is the anthropological; that is, what do we learn from connecting with these creative, cultural ambassadors who live among us and actually create the world we live in? In this way of thinking, we are all on a mission intended to connect with “creatives”: musicians, poets, dancers, thinkers, and artists. And while music is the driving genre, the best match for hearing what the world might sound like, cultural relevancy matters in other things we discover when we talk to folks. It unveils “explorations” that include all kinds of “people matters” around us that shape how we live. Secondly, all this too is in the interest of artistic process, expression, and defining what the “is” is of what artists do.

What are these artists up to now, why, how and, who cares? In every questioning form, we are always speaking to a collection of contemporary musicians, artists, and thinkers.

How do we mechanize this? We need to think like the “lead producer” of a radio hour, helping to organize materials, content, guests, do the field research, collect the materials of inquiry, conduct interviews, and listen to the music people are making and the poetry the poets chant. Doing this in a larger way, as a “production think-tank team,” would craft this out, in terms of time, sound, and feel of the reporting. And we need to be an incubator and interrogator, helping to seed all this, overseeing the larger process with regard to how this fits in the study stream and how these ideas affect teaching, performing, and creating. The action model I use as an example here is to simply speak of a deliverable and a reason to do this—all this is action based.

I think engagement with cultural makers in our midst connected with a more sustainable concept of relevancy is a new frontier, the front lines of being creative, of cultural reporting, extending even to the Internet and the global beat of the streets.

The idea of a journey and the search for cultural relevancy comes out of the great effusion of the variety of culture and information hybridity in our contemporary times. These questions about what and how human creative activity has meaning in our culture, and how it matters to people, is the most relevant and challenging question in a time when too much has been reduced to commodification, and yet the world through technology provides access to a wide number of things that can be accessed on demand.

These questions are on another level of exchange and sharing, one of exchange of ideas.

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That is what I mean in terms of arts and humanities—it’s human subject matters and how people live in the world they care about, which is something we need a bit more of in the world today. What, then, are we demanding from our culture? What will count and matter for us that contributes to the furtherance, deepening, sustainability, and understanding of our human codes? This, in my mind, is the current challenge of relevancy from the human question side.

Music as a Language of Humanization

The people have no music that is in coordination with their spirits. Because of this, they are out of tune with the universe.

—Sun Ra, *Brother from Another Planet*

Music is a language of humanization. So it’s a citizen activity, with all the implications of sharing for the greater cause of touching and engaging lives. That’s the only way, I surmised, I want to do music from now on. It never really occurred to me before so clearly. So much of what we do today in art is mechanized by an external industry apparatus, a false commercial rationale and system for doing, evaluating, dispensing, and selling a product “called music.” And so when we come to our senses and feel that “Wait, this is not what, why, or for whom we do music,” it can become renewing to become made aware again about why we all do this, music-izing. The idea of ethnomusicologizing comes out of the practice of music-ing in our contemporary times.

The question about what music is and what it means in our culture, and how it matters to people, is always relevant for the music maker. If I thought about making music—first, out of my birthplace, Detroit, moving as a young musician to Mexico, then studying in Boston, studying music culture in West Africa, returning for graduate studies, then starting as a young composer, professor, and performer in the Midwest—that is one part of a journey as an emerging music citizen.

Moving through years of travels, sharing your music across the United States, the Midwest to the West and North to South, and through various style and trend configurations over four decades, a lot of music comes back at you and through you. You grow up being in music. But one notices too the pull, the drain on your emotions and energies due to the confused or

meaningless talk, the rigmarole of institutional affiliations, collegial turf battles about approach and definitions, industry ill-practices, technology, the important debates, and how young people newly define the field. Yes, even in musical arts, one needs renewal.

After some reflections during a ride across the Swiss farmlands on a train, I was engaged in a debate of sorts with colleagues about how one gets to report on these questions, meanings, and matters of people engaged in music-ing. In other words, what qualifies a bona-fide ethnomusicologist? What are the qualifying criteria? I am often pleasantly reminded of Steve Biko, a South African thinker who titled his book *I Write What I Like*.

Given the extraordinary amount of info out there today, in so many forms on the Internet, blogs, web pages, electronic press kits (EPKs), the me-so-about-me journalism, you come to see all this as being an information highway run by police who feel that the law is “Say what you want your way and in any fast and furious method or device you can get.” But for the sake of clarity, musicology is an academic discipline largely defined by where the discourse lies and by those who most often are involved in the explorations, analyses, and questions about doing music—in other words, mostly among people who think, write, and follow the debates about cultural relevancy.

So the deliverable is usually a collection of dates, data, interviews, music recorded/transcribed, photos, and sources about this or that happening shared by a field of exploring cultural information gatherers, with a focus on these various questions. Here in these discussions, we call upon the discipline terms that incorporate the themes and ideas of reciprocity, hegemony, phenomenology, ethnology, qualitative protocols (step by step to get to hard and soft data), finding themes and making meanings of themes, processing and analyzing the data, and assessment, which then hopefully brings you to what is the real meaning of all this “stuff” and why it matters, and then how it really affects people.

One great example we have in American music that exhibits this idea of being culturally relevant, community, music, culture, society activated, is the set of Black church music traditions. Its use of the spirit of the singers’ songs to raise people up and to illuminate the issues of the world is notable here. Its example is rich and illustrative of being courageously invested in the message to the world. Gospel does mean just the good news, and that

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is widely applied here to great effect. Civil rights, social protest, and soul all get their institutional champion from this tradition. Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Marvin Gaye, and Aretha Franklin were all dealing with the effects of war, political engagement, police brutality, government in balance, political unrest, women's rights, and hearing the voice of a younger generation. All this music and thought called the nation, the world, to a higher ground. The minister of the church, and the minister of songs Stevie Wonder, and hundreds of other singer/songwriters and performers took to the studio, stage, and streets. These sounds raised the dialogue and commitments of civility, courage, and communities' ideals to walk in the world differently. This was due to the meaning and powerful call the music had. You don't have to be religious to see the relevance and resonance of truth put into action. The music and the movements made a huge difference in our society. From W. C. Handy, Nat King Cole, John Coltrane, James Cleveland, the Isley Brothers, Sam Cooke, Nina Simone, Mavis Staples, Aretha Franklin, Al Green, and Whitney Houston to D'Angelo—they are all musical artists who were shaped, trained, and encouraged in the powerful Black gospel music tradition. In fact, Handy, Cole, Franklin, Simone, and D'Angelo were all PKs—preachers' kids. All American popular music from this era—Elton John, John Lennon, Janis Joplin, Joe Cocker, Bruce Springsteen—got their sacred sights and sounds from this tradition as they took their unique styles and voices to the popular music marketplace. A thorough exploration of this tradition in music and its impact on our cultural development provides all the necessary lessons that define what we mean by *ethnomusicologizing* and *cultural relevance*.

Again, as stated earlier, I'm simply suggesting that musicians extend these “standard” frameworks and take time in our music making to connect more critically. I think all this applies to being a composer and a songwriter, and I think it applies equally to a musician, a performer, or an artist sharing in a performance that is now enhanced beyond entertainment and includes real engagement with ideas that connect more deeply. That makes the song better, the performance richer, the music finer, and the people, the audience, happier and more sustained.

Each “gatherer” deserves his or her right to report and share. In my mind, it's all good—largely because everyone picks and chooses the information they want anyway. I'm solely responsible for the quality of my work, and my ideas should express my commitments and the interpretation of

the music, people, and the cultural contexts I feel passionate about. I'm not interested in upholding, defending, or preserving a pedagogy, approach, or value system for traditional music systems or measurements. Much of the old systems of valuing, making, and measuring have shifted, and the young people who are responding to our culture simply see things differently.

So what I am suggesting is that what is clearly relevant today is, number one, to take a deep look at what is happening in the world of popular culture and read it well. Then, take a look into our deeper creative selves to see what we value to come to some sense of what to make of the world we live in. Somewhere in the academy, we have lost the connecting bridges between what we think about the world, how we feel about us in it, and what matters in terms of relating to other people in the world we all live in. Art making is a balancing act of seeing, feeling, thinking, giving, and listening.

On a recent trip to Cuba, I interviewed one of the leading young hip-hop artists, Edgardo González, and he shared his thoughts with me.

Hip-hop I think is really explicit, but it doesn't allow you to enjoy the whole spectrum of what's possible. It has a speech, that is a story about someone, or what someone wants you to think. But music has to be like poetry. It has a speech but at the same time allows you to experience it different ways. That way, each person [who] listens will have a whole world of feelings to connect with inside. That's what I want to do with my music, with the hip-hop language. It's like composing music. You have to think outside the box. It doesn't have to follow the same line that you have a speech, rap, that talks about just the issues that hip-hop talks about. You have to mix it up. And that is the thing, when you're young: you have to be exposed to a lot of music. I think music is one language it doesn't matter. If you happen to be closer to hip-hop, that just means a lot of the music you use comes from that, but if you use Afro-Cuba, Brazilian, funk, you are going to put that into it. If you read poetry, "read film," you can put those kinds of emotions and translate that experience into music.

He raised these themes:

"Whole spectrum of what's possible"

"Story about someone"

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“Music like poetry”

“Experience, in different ways”

“Each person, whole world of feelings to connect with inside”

“You have to think outside the box”

“Mix it up”

“Exposure to a lot of music”

“Music is one language”

“Read poetry, read film”

“Emotions, experience translated into music”

While this only represents one young producer/musician’s ideas, it signals for me a whole range of applications that come from the contemporary garden of sampling, mashups, and Google-able relevant matters that are well founded. These are “values” that people have, and while they are expressed in different ways, they are especially important because it’s where “people live” today. So my own “read” of this—which, by the way, mirrors a lot of what’s going on in contemporary popular culture among hundreds of young people I speak with—is: Why not create an understanding of music that follows some of these ideas: “story about someone,” “music like poetry,” “experience, in different ways,” “each person, whole world of feelings to connect with inside”? As a composer, I would teach a class of student-composers that if music were to matter, it needed to do these things.

If I were speaking to a class of ethnomusicologists, I would suggest that they engage within a community, in South Central LA, for example, or learn the current songs of young Israeli songwriters, because they should be focused on “music as one language,” “read poetry, read film,” and “emotions, experience translated into music.” In this way, we “read the culture” and build up from that human expressions that matter and reveal our highest creative aspirations.

Teaching about Culture: A Short View on Definitions, Methods, Pedagogy of Practice

Ethnomusicologizing then becomes the ideas of following the lines of music through the lives of living in and around music making in culture—that is, being concerned enough to explore and share what the music means to people. The musicology part is easy enough to explain. What

defines “ethno” is simply the specific lives and music culture of ethnic folk—the vernacular, common people’s music and culture from within a community.

For example, who are the “blues people” Leroy Jones talked about, and what do they value in their songs and practices as musicians? How direct is the creation of the music to people, and does it relate to the world of the living? What is the exploration of music making, its implications for those involved, connected with accompanying living in this life, current and forward? How? Why?

Our role is a conduit, a cultural explorer. This is cultural exploration as a way to provide a deeper expression and examination of the larger world we live in, with an emphasis on the ideas of “diverse voices” in and around arts and creative agency.

Again, while music can be the driving genre and the best match for many of these questions, cultural relevancy and the other things you discover when you talk to folks unveil all kinds of ways people around us live. Secondly, the process, and defining the “is” of what people do, is important. What inspired these artists to create this movement, that program, that serves this community? How does someone produce an interesting beat? What makes the poetry mean? How does a composer orchestrate, what does she or he listen to and for? What are these artists up to now, why, how, and who cares?

Another question becomes how to report on the approach, the methods, and the evaluation of the information gathered. And lastly, and very importantly, who cares and why? My methods are simple. I listen, I jam, I ask questions, and I observe because I want to share. Further, I believe the “why” is connected to one’s passion. In my case, I am a musician, and I care about music and the songs that represent the stories and ideas of the people in a culture. But again, this line of inquiry is mostly from an academic, closed community, and the real connection to everyday people is limited to a concert and talks on a panel at best.

I believe a new way forward is to create more opportunities for people, more culture studies to not only be engaged in but also show how the greater understanding of the art of a community benefits the people directly.

In this case, if we are hanging out and creating, exploring a church community, then why not have the community present a concert of its

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newly composed songs, hymns, dances, or poetry that reflects back and instructs, that informs the community about what its young creators are thinking, feeling? But here again, whether it is about sharing, teaching, jamming, and collaborating or creating a new work, everything is generated out of a passion and an understanding of why we do any of this. That bridge of reflection must be consciously and actively walked across, a bridge between why we are doing this and how we are doing this.

Composers and Creators as “Gatherers”

Our job here should be to try to help in rebuilding a people's culture that yet is a major source of ideas and inspiration . . . of real value to the world.

—Pat Patrick

I recently thought about why composers have, in the past, been some of the best studied, prepared, and suited for the discipline of ethnomusicology. Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály, Carl Orff, and others were composers who not only wrote folk and art music traditions, but also they sang, researched, and presented those findings to the larger general public.

All of my own fieldwork, transcriptions of music, and translations and interpretations of styles that I have done over these many years of travels, interviews, and residencies are all found in my scores. From that “fieldwork,” living in those communities, I have created the music of my repertoire and you can find that work notated there. (See, for example, *Affirmations*, Symphony 10, 2010.)

The work of Zora Neale Hurston and many Black American artist/thinkers who made deep inroads into the disciplines of ethnomusicology were great examples of the work of countless trained musicians who had the chops, the passion, and the creative gifts to go into and among the people and not only create but also explore, engage, do the critical research, and produce the scholarship so appreciated in our field.

In several of my own professional capacities, I have been able to see and oversee the presentation of hundreds of emerging younger scholars, many of whom are future ethnomusicologists. Their work is the future.

The questions they are asking, like Edgardo González in Cuba, and the lenses they use to engage global culture are changing our field. When I studied ethnomusicology more formally and received my doctorate, I

trained at the University of Michigan under Rich Crawford, Judith Beecker, and the composers William Bolcolm and William Albright. I did my first fieldwork in West Africa (1985) and extended that to collecting original materials from South America, collected by a dear friend who brought the songs recorded back to me. I composed my symphony 4, *Streams of Consciousness* (1993), based on those songs, as I mentioned earlier. Following, I began to incorporate local songs, and my impressions and themes became the guiding materials for all my symphonies, art songs, chamber music, and jazz compositions. In many cases, many of us get to share that “creative song” with the community in the form of a public concert or talk about the process, or just doing a performance, jamming with folks.

What needs to happen more in ethnomusicology is that the “gatherers” of cultural data need to focus on more of what the intentions and meanings of the “folk” are, and in assessing the value and worth of the music or poetry or dance or discussions provide that report to the community as they assess the value and impact of making music for the benefit directly of their communities, their musicians, their local neighborhoods. In this way the “outsider” becomes part of the work to make a better community.

Putting Practice to People

One of the main things I share with my students is the question: How do you tie your life into the larger culture, and what does it mean to be in the world as a human being who lives and makes music?

Ultimately the balance of those two realities (being a citizen, being an artist) directly impacts the music.

I think there could be a new arts and culture core for education:

1. *Engagement*. Full immersion, having sustainable, substantive talk and reflection about what living means, “living inside” a cultural context with people, history, and values connected to life experiences.
2. *Cultural Studies Lens*. A real critical look at expressions, rituals, and the examination of ideas connected to the importance of identity (cultural, personal, national), class, race, gender, and power.

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3. *Exploration of Various Artistic Expressions* (dance, poetry, music) that are connected directly to the everyday human social meaning and values, by reviewing the jazz age, the Harlem Renaissance, Woody Guthrie, the rise of folk traditions, rock and roll, social protest and soul music, hip-hop, and the emergence of current contemporary popular cultures.

In this day of fast electronic access, people need to be aware of our human narrative, the value of expressive exchange, and its role in defining our continued capacity to exist and live together. Arts are our language of humanization, and it's an ongoing, all-encompassing, in-process expression.

Near the end of a semester, a teacher should be able to say, "Look at your notes, readings, text, and remember the experiences of our engagement over the past months. Now, take what you've seen and learned and critically apply that to what you see is necessary to chart the path forward in your education and creative and living life experiences."

I think the priority is a focus on the value of being a critical yet creative thinker and, through that thinking, inspire others to creative agency.

"I'm going to give you one note today see how many ways you can play that note—growl it, smear it, flat it, sharp it, do anything you want to it. That's how you express your feelings in this music. It's like talking." That's one way the history of music mentoring begins. Sidney Bechet taught younger player Richard Hadlock how to play "this music like talking."

My entire research focus as an artist-scholar-teacher has been to explore, document, and value the exchange of artists' ideas in music and culture in history, to focus on things like the value of history and spiritual/social/political meaning in music.

Everything I know about my people, my cultural history, is given through Black music and arts. So that makes for me, this history, this art, critical to life. If you study this history, this great evolving story, you will find life greatly sculpted into a movement of personalities, ideas, heart, values, spirit, science, innovation and music, literature and arts. There is no universal music.

All musical expression is predicated, created, expressed, and interpreted through the filter of human experience, which is not universal, it's specific. Music without a notion of race, ethnicity, and culture exists nowhere. Why would any group want a universal music?

The reality of culture, ethnicity, image, sexuality, and protest are the filters, the expressions of human experience and reality through which all of our perceptions of music must pour through. All human experience begins with specific concrete conditions that are not abstract. Music becomes a function of that reality, grounded in that experience.

When you create a piece of music, you share that music, that special expression of your soul, with a group of other musicians. They play the music and feel happy too, because their creative souls are engaged; all are sharing. Then they share that music by playing it for other people who come to hear them—and wow, what a great share fest! That’s how music works; it’s a great gifting.

Ethnomusicology is a focus about the value of common culture expression, and how to identify and use themes, concepts, and interdisciplinary bridges to link music culture with broad-based learning objectives in education. If we could model the idea of the worth and value of a fuller picture of music education for our students, we could ensure the next generation of artists would make even deeper inroads with their music doing and being, and I don’t think such aims are too high-minded or far from our already rich practices in culture.

Conclusion

The idea of ethnomusicologizing again comes out of the practice of music-ing in our contemporary times. Again, these questions about what and how music means in our culture and how it matters to people are the most relevant and challenging questions in a time when music is being reduced to a commoditized idea, and yet the world through technology allows for a wider number of things currently to be accessed on demand. What, then, are we demanding from our music and music makers, and what will count and matter for us that contributes to the furtherance, deepening, sustainability, and understanding of our human codes? That is thinking, caring, loving, contributing, and inspiring “life.”

This, in my mind, is the current challenge of ethnomusicology and making music and art today.

The following essays, travel reports, interviews, and discussions on music reflect many of these ideas and approaches here, but none of these are one way or “standard.”

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These are just offerings as ways to engage newer communities of music with technologies, to explore the emergence of new music, artists, and movements in popular culture and, more importantly, to share a way of talking among musicians, artists, and thinkers who are also participating in the creating and the teaching of artistry in the modern world.

Coda Box

Summary sentence: Ethnomusicologizing is the practice of music-ing in our contemporary times. This addresses the critical questions about what and how music means in our culture, our contemporary living, within technology, business and commerce, education. It also asks how it matters to people, what we are demanding from our music and music makers, and considers what will count and matter for us that contributes to the furtherance, deepening, sustainability, understanding, thinking, caring, loving, contributing, and inspiring others with our art.

Terms

Ethnomusicologizing:	The act of being with the common man, doing music and art in ways that connect
Cultural relevancy:	What matters to the culture you live in
Long-term cultural relevancy:	Historical, cultural significance
Market relevancy:	What sells with the people, now?
Manufactured relevancy:	Your “hustle”
Generational cultural transfer:	Older people sharing wisdom to younger people, in tandem
Cultural context:	The times, styles, places your expressions live within
Music is a language of humanization:	Art speaks of the human condition
Engagement:	Sharing what you are thinking, experiencing

ETHNOMUSICOLOGIZING AND CULTURAL RELEVANCY

- Sustainable talk and reflection: Meaningful exchange and critical thinking
- Cultural studies lens: Critical look at implications of the expression to reflect the meanings of the ritual, examination of identity, class, race, gender/sexuality, politics, and power

CHAPTER TWO

ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

STUDIES IN MUSIC CULTURE

Dear Langston,

I am just beginning to hit my stride . . . for I not only want to present the material with all the life and color of my people, I want to leave no loopholes for the scientific crowd to rend and tear us. But as I work, . . . I find new phrases from moment to moment. . . . Oh I love my religious material. Some of it is priceless. Know what I am attempting? To set an entire Baptist service word for word, and note for note. . . . I shall prop it up on every leaning side. I shall cut the dull spots in the service to the minimum, and play up the art.

—Lovingly, Zora (April 30, 1929)

It cannot be denied that the impulse to begin folk song research, as well as any folklore science in general, is attributable to the awakening of national feeling. . . . [T]he members of each nation were convinced that the possession of such treasures was their only and particular privilege. . . . [They] found a certain consolation in these treasures, their self-consciousness grew stronger and consolidated. . . . [T]he study and publication of folk music values were an adequate means of re-solidifying the national feeling of the more cultured strata which in consequence of oppression has suffered damage on more than one point.

—Béla Bartók, *Essay of Folk Songs and Nationalism* (1937)

Dizzy no speak Spanish. I no speak English. But both we speak Africa.

—Chano Pozo, to interviewer about Dizzy Gillespie, when asked:
“How do you communicate with Dizzy?”

Actions, Attitudes

To be a good musician, you have to have a sensitive ear to what's going on around you. You have to listen to other musicians, read poets, dream inside the frames of an artist's colors and strokes, and dance with your feet propelled by the beats of your generation. You must be propelled by the culture's impulses. That is what we, as artists, live to do. An ethnomusicologist records the feelings, sentiments, and expressions of people in order to bring some better understanding of how people live in the world, really. And art is the record of those feelings and experiences.

There is sometimes suspicion, caution, concerns, and an outright rejection of an ethnoculturalist interpretation or exploration of creative arts. Today's current generation is usually all the more doubting of such with the idea of a "postracial" world, in an era of more female and Hispanic Supreme Court appointments, an African American president, a non-European pope. So why, then, should an "ethno" perspective or slant be of interest? I think we simply mean that there is now in place—more than in decades before, due to people moving around the globe, the Internet, and modern connective culture and media—a bigger picture of the world than just ourselves. An "ethno or global view" is simply a bigger exploration of music, culture, and contemporary expressive phenomena in the wider world.

Because of how music is so integrated to every aspect of life activity for African people, I started asking how that applies for black people. It applies totally. We can see how our music has evolved and at every point that our history has taken another turn, our music has taken another turn. That to me is evidence of music's functionality. Then when you start to look at what the music says and how it was created and how it is used, it is totally clear that we have never dropped that aspect of who we are as African people.

—Dr. Ysaye Barnwell

The very nature of particularly American culture is "roots and folk-people based" identities in sound, dance, word, story, and images. What is more American than a Norman Rockwell painting or Bessie Smith singing the

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blues? The main point here is that a sustainable teaching pedagogy, a historical culture studies platform, has huge educational payoff in all directions for studies in history and performance and for working in and cultivating arts, culture, and humanities in general. The history of American music is one of the richest human social cultural narratives we can look to.

Our living is rich with ethnic culture “stuff,” folk stories, and the capacity of people to pursue, survive, create, thrive, and build a better community, society, and world and cultivate sustainable rich inner-dynamic spiritual-cultural integrity. The phenomenology, the observations, of what things come out of your audience, your poetry slam, the jam, the song fest, and the choir rehearsal are part of the work of sensitive musicians.

Here, there is an important cultural essentialist framework that matters. What did these folks do over here in their music? The more specific you are, the more universal you become. Everybody loves music, and everybody needs a song, a beat for their heads to bop to and their feet to tap to, and a melody that makes their hearts soar.

So the exploration of other cultures began as a way of increasing the scope of subjects that people were investigating and studying. Cultural and ethnic studies become a regular part of the '60s and '70s college curriculum, and institutions of all sorts, civic and private, began to change. I think today it is a matter of deepening the connectivity as this relates to larger meanings in cultural relevancy. Global music, reggae, Afro pop, Latin forms, the music of India, and Mediterranean rhythms—these modes can be found in all our musics as regular and as normative as the blues. Human living is such a common denominator of our experiences, our human coding. Human expressions literally give voice to this coding. Cultural codes, then, are some tangible, fixed, and flexible expression points that mark and make real the seas of culture we swim through and in.

A Global Conversation, April 2012

With Carlos Averhoff (Cuba), Ash Devine (London), Mora Ben Yakir (Israel), Tamika Colon (the Republic of Brooklyn), Ben Morrison (Fiji Islands), Annetta Oduor (Kenya), Yun Huang (China), and Edgardo González (Cuba)

I convened a group of international music students (2011–2013) for a series of discussions centering on the global issues facing young artists today.

Their main concern was that their cultural voices, identities, and histories were being washed away in the commercial soaping of American popular culture. We called the discussions “Conversations: Cultural Context Collective,” focusing on why music matters in different cultures around the world. The idea is to train musicians to go out and change the world, but that means those musicians have to be “from the world.” I’m really interested in this focused discussion among us. As well, we held more conversations with hip-hop producer Edgardo González, from the Alamar neighborhood from Cuba, as lead rapper for Cuba’s Doble Filo. The two conversations intersect, and I include the Edgardo excerpts here around the question of the “loss of that sense of connection and journey in the cultural roots and the cross-sections of older traditions,” the new “mashup” in contemporary culture, and what answers young musicians have for these challenges.

Bill: You all have been talking about your training, but then taking that back to the communities you are from. That’s our basic idea today, a focused discussion on cultural perspectives. So we wanted to talk to see how you all are really seeing the world.

Tamika: When music was like, we all remember how it was . . . before it became known as just something to make money, or a get-rich scheme, it was about feeling. It’s lost the feeling. You guys [the international musicians there at the table] all have roots. The one thing that is wrong with Americans is, we don’t know enough about American culture.

Ben: But you know what’s scary about it? What happened with American culture, I feel like it’s going to happen to ours too.

Annetta: It’s happened already.

Ben: We’ve got to do something about it.

Yun: Yes, yes. A lot of younger-aged people, they don’t even know.

Carlos: That’s happening now as a global situation.

Mora: On the other hand, it’s important not to forget that the time we are living in is a very special time when maybe traditions are losing their roots, but at the same time we are developing something as one. The borders and languages, countries, doesn’t mean as much as it did, and there’s a lot of positive value in this as well.

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The fact that I can be here today and make music with a Palestinian musician, and we are not really thinking about it, it doesn't matter. Because we speak English, and we speak the same language of music, and this means so much. This is a reflection of what's going on in the world, and that's the beauty about it. And soon the aliens will come and we'll be like one family. [All laugh.]

Tamika: Music is something now I want to promote and exploit, in a good way, art and artists. Besides music, I want to get more into philosophy. I want to be in an instructive environment, where I can be challenged by someone else's teachings.

Beyond that, I just want to live, explore life for myself, continuing to feed my spirituality. Being around different people's mind-sets, religions, cultures, impacts me a lot because it allows me to go into the world and do what I would like to do. What am I finding? We are all on a journey to find this out, finding a way to get to where you are going. And try to make "your own."

Ben: Yes, I'm the first student here from the South Pacific, a Pacific Islander.

Bill: How does the study of Black music, or looking at music and society in this way, connect with your traditions?

Ben: I think every aspect, the characteristics of African retentions, are very similar to our traditional music. The griots aspect of African music, the whole feel, the rhythms, the harmonies are all very organic. And, as well, the spiritual thing.

Bill: Give me examples, specifics.

Ben: I think call and response. The use of drum, traditions. Dance. Dance is a very big part of our culture. Music is big in our culture. We use music for different functions. The welcoming of a new season, a chief coming into the village, the birth of a new baby. There are so many uses of music in our culture. It's a source of our history to pass on, stories, values, truths. Most of what I see here in America is in conflict with our culture, because of the purpose of the general consensus of student musicians is to make yourself better by being famous and being a successful musician. But music back at home is a very sacred thing. Music brings people together, it's not about an individual, it's about a whole.

Annetta: I feel like in Africa, it's kind of schizophrenic right now. You don't know what part of your tradition to hold onto, or what part of modernity to grasp. As Africans we are very conservative. So seeing a picture of Beyoncé, Rihanna, like this [shows *Vanity Fair* photo of Rihanna] here gets you sales, at home it costs you sales. You'll get famous, and everyone will know who you are, but you don't really want that in your house, or playing in your house. You'll want it in the club, but not spend money for it. Decency trumps sexiness back at home. So as a musician you need to live decent and respectable to be respected as a musician. Music is a way of life. It's my generation that's seeing it as a source of income. But traditionally in Africa music is always about life. There's a song for a funeral, a wedding. We sang as children all the time.

Yun: I'm from a Cantonese state, a city close to Hong Kong. I'm Cantonese. I speak Mandarin and Cantonese. I think as everybody knows, China is a big market right now. But really we don't have "our own" contemporary music right now because China is not very open. All the music, writers, and composers are writing music for the government, state composers. Lots of traditions, so styles will be combined in the songs. But these are not harmonic based. We are good at counterpoint and melody.

For us, jazz is so different. Nobody knows what those chords are. So for me, I was lucky, because when I was young my family was a bit more open, not traditional. My dad plays violin, my grandfather is a Cantonese opera singer. I like different music. Chinese opera is cool.

Mora: Modern Israel is only 60 years old. There's nothing that is really "Israeli music." It's all influenced from the surrounding Middle East countries. During the last century there were immigrants from Eastern Europe and North Africa, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and also Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Egypt. I am half Yemenite, my grandparents are from Yemen.

And my father's side is from Eastern Europe. I am the perfect balance of Israel, 50/50. So everybody else brought a lot of contribution, from Poland, Germany composers from the 1930s, '40s, '50s. Then like for everybody else, in the '60s, the rock and roll came over. And we were like everybody else in the world, a reflection of what was going on all over.

Bill: What do you want to take back to your home from what you are learning here?

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Ben: Well, for me, music is not about the music. For me, being a musician is another way to dig into myself as a person. It's all about the personality development and the process of life, and music is just a tool, a way for me to develop myself. And this could be through other forms of art too—finding out who you are as you encounter the world.

Bill: What are the benefits and poisons of these popular traditions? We all have to work together on changing these conditions, the larger conditions, and in your own communities, to making being a musician and a human citizen more possible today. And certainly music and the education in the arts can help.

Tamika: Well, you can't ever listen to music. That's the negative side of my education for me. We are not normal. I'm trying to listen to a song, and you have 10 seconds for me to like your music. I'm not being rude, I'm just trying to see what are you going to do that's different. Today, every vocal singer sounds the same. A lot of people have the same traditions.

"This person did it, so I'm going to do it." Nobody's trying to be different, everybody is trying to latch onto what worked for that other person. Everybody is just doing "pop covers."

Ash: That's the whole thing connected to reaching fame. The people who are doing covers are doing that to get tagged on YouTube, so the people who are listening to the originals are going to notice the person's cover so they can get recognized. It's the whole thing of trying to appeal to the masses.

Annetta: The biggest problem with that, too, is that people are looking to do anything that is "different." And they latch onto that "different" stuff without respecting the aesthetic. There is a group of people who now have decided they want to do African music. But they lump it into one, they have no respect for the history or why certain things are done. There is really more to Africa than drumming from one region or vocal traditions in southern Africa!

Bill: Carlos, what did music mean for you growing up in Cuba?

Carlos: In my particular case, music means to me everything. Why? Because my father was a founding member of Irakere. It was one of the best groups in Cuba for 35 years. Since I was born, I was hearing all kinds of music, Latin jazz and African styles in a strong way. That's my roots. And also, I learned about my neighborhood. I was not living

in the best neighborhood. I learned here about the roots of the African rhythmic patterns from the private parties, every weekend you can listen to the music. For each Cuban, the music is very important. The music is in the streets, even if they don't know anything. The music is in each corner—80 percent of my life is music.

Bill: What could we be doing better, to make music as rich, so it's not so materialistic?

Ben: My journey here is very specific. And it's change. I think music is pointless if it doesn't make a change in a person's life. It's good to be artistic, but the highest level of music that has made a difference throughout the ages, I feel, caused a transition between each genre, it made changes. It affects emotions, thoughts, and ideas. I feel like that is one of the most powerful tools, more powerful than politicians. Because [music has] a bigger ability to change people, affect the whole person. I'm coming from Fiji, and I see it needs change.

There is change around the world. What needs to change is how we today see music. What's your perspective in music? Is it used to make you sound better? To be famous, or for what great musicians have done, to make a change?

Edgaro and Bill (November 2012, Cuba)

Bill: Hip-hop started out with a kind of connection from Afrika Bambaataa, all the way from Kool Herc, all the way through, from Jamaica and on up. But they all linked the conditions of the folks with the older traditions through the music from Jamaica. So, at least the earlier generation of hip-hoppers understood, through sampling, the carrying on of these traditions. They understood the social-political implications of rap and hip-hop. As the market expanded, we have lost that sense of connection and journey in the cultural roots. This doesn't mean that today's younger generation can't be informed by this, about their role as griots. In my work, I teach and trace this back to the role of the African griots, storytellers, culture bearers, the genealogy, the history of the music, along with social-cultural meanings implied by the music.

Edgaro: No, you are right, it's understanding where this all came from. What I did with my project "Beyond the Sample," I wanted to know why something sounds more "New York-ish." What made it

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sound like Rubalcaba? What happened? What was the influence? It was the same time that Herbie Hancock was putting scratch into jazz for the first time on national television. Chucho Valdés and Herbie were friends. What I find interesting especially in Cuba now is it's like in a bubble. We don't have all the information from the outside. You see that, for example, in Cuba's pop music history.

From the '70s, it's not really pop, it's jazzy. It's funk. It's not that they wanted to do it that way. It's the subconscious, the appropriation of what they thought pop was. And they put all these Cuban rhythms with funk, with a little bit of reggae. For example, they didn't have electric guitars, we had the Cuban tres [guitar]. And they had to figure out what the tres was to do, to fill out that void. And that is what I find fascinating about creativity in Cuba. It is out of a lack of information that all of these mixtures come.

Bill: But that whole thing is the formula for Cuban successful survival, it seems, across the board. That becomes the formula for living in general. For musicians, artists, common people—figuring it out.

Edgaro: I think what's happening, the result now, is we are all living in this "mixed culture," especially on the Internet era and with all YouTube. But the problem is, you got all this information but you don't know where it's coming from, then you mix it together. But you have to see the results, also see where it came from, each path. OK, this came from Africa, this came from Cuba. I don't know much about American jazz, where did Herbie come from? Like blues.

Bill: Well, a lot of young musicians in the States don't know either. They don't know about New Orleans traditions, as a great seaport that brought all those people in from the African diaspora. They don't know the mixes and the paths that lead to their own music.

So from both sides of this equation, we can be a part of a dialogue that helps younger musicians and older contemporary folks look at the value of those mixes. It would be great to have a radio program that dealt with this, so people could hear the dialogue and the music, the various journeys and paths. What do we call this?

Edgaro: "In the Paths," "In the Mix." A good result of these talks is, even though we are talking about Cuba and America, it's incredible how these musics leaked through to the whole globe, and vice versa. And the music from the globe leaked into that. It's all connected, the music is one.

Bill: Yes, and to make them accessible and culturally relevant and meaningful. The formula is the past, the current, they make a path for the future.

Edgardo: Yeah, but that's what drives me in my production. I want to find out more of Chucho Valdés, and his fat synth bass music sound. That's what we are doing in hip-hop and electronic music. I'm searching for where this thing came from because I want to use it right now. I need it. What recordings, what demo? I'm also interested in how blues music translates into Cuban music. When the revolution started, it was so nationalist. For Fidel, he was really saying, "That's the enemies' music." But a lot of folk singers back then, they loved the blues. But they couldn't sing it because it was in English. So they came up with a word for it, and they called the music and what they wanted to do "feeling." Because when they were asked to describe it in Spanish, they said, "Well it's a feeling." This was the music, in the after-night, in the bars. It was in the '50s. And this connects to my music today, straight from my neighborhood, Alamar, Cuba, pirate radio!

Coda

[By 2002] Havana had had a hip-hop festival that for 10 years was "the most important hip-hop festival" in the world. It converged in Havana, in the summer of 1995. It was all about the word. "The word was revolution, self-actualization." Mainstream hip-hop had already become dominant, vapid, which is what happens in this country when the commercial forces take over. People think crap sells. But in Alamar, Havana, a cradle of hip-hop birth happened. It sits at a higher elevation than the rest of the city, and so in the '90s people put aluminum foil on their antennas and caught broadcasts from Miami, 92.5 FM. The radio jargon was caught, and that's how hip-hop entered Havana. So, here's this flaw in the system of ideas and information and suddenly, hip-hop breaks through.

This is '90, '91, '92, '93. . . . This happened during the "special period" in Cuba. So what do hard times do? It makes people poets. The hip-hop beats, music is entering Cuba. They don't at first always know exactly what the people rhyme about, but the hip-hop culture starts to permeate the youth culture. Rap takes a foothold. But it's too the kind of orality of speaking at great speed, and at a time too when people had something to say, and as well it's this cultural thing. . . . hip-hop is born in Cuba. Yrak [Saenz] becomes the pioneering rapper

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in Cuba, and his second in command, a younger prodigy, Edgardo, fronts for the group. It becomes Doble Filo, which means the double edge.

—from interview with Beth Bone, director of Miami Light Project

Interview with Edgardo Continued (February 2013, Cuba)

Edgardo: It's interesting that in hip-hop conception we compose the whole from the different parts first, we flip it around. Fifty years from now, the way I think will be the established way. You can't stop that.

Bill: Well, that's a whole other approach. The way I'm looking at it is mixing all of that together as another production, in a creative way. I'm thinking about the song structure that we come in with. I'm playing those bass lines; we have to do the instrumental parts of this, both the bass lines, the harmonies, the song forms. Then that's all laid down with the beat production patterns that you are creating. I think from that we layer that up from there, so melodies, the voice loop, the singers will sing it. So, I will lay in the instrumentation, horns, strings, whatever, I think that's the way we can layer it.

The interesting thing for me is that you all hear things, in segments. We hear the work as a whole. It's a different way. You are not just slicing tape, but you are constructing sound segments, which become a production. That's just different.

Edgardo: What the kids hear today around the world is, they need some sample, and they are looking for music. We want them to listen to something that's says to them, "That's me." And what that is, is contemporary hip-hop production. They need samples cut in. It's specific codes, like what Robert Fonesca is doing. He was one of the first with samples, the music, and playing—one of the first artists to do this for me. It's easier for the new generations to hear, that brings them in. We need people to be like "We understand this."

Bill: Yeah, the only thing that is connecting is what is relevant. I don't think it diminishes the artists at all to be in touch with the people, which is what we all have been talking about. That relational moment allows you to bring something new to them, pulls them along, your way. But also, you get pulled a little along that way, the people's way, what the

people are dealing with, with the impulses of the people, and with that you have to have a balance.

Finding “Future Aesthetics”

Many contemporary artists have responded in more recent ways with a continuation of this global resonance, yet seen in the parameters of creative expressions in the States in music, poetry, painting, and dance, creating another blend for a “future aesthetic mix.”

Hip-hop, early on, was a prime and powerful example of this.

There are a few figures most recently that strike at exemplifying what is meant by artists who represent and work within a “grounded aesthetics” that mirror attention to craft, social commitments where attitude, meaning, and music/art combine. All of this points to firmly held beliefs that support the art, style, rhetoric, and ultimately artistic performance codes: Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960–1988), Wynton Marsalis (b. 1961), Kurt Cobain (1967–1994), Erykah Badu (b. 1971). Their sounds and representations ignited other artists and the generation of their times: Basquiat—out of the consciousness of the late 1970s and early 1980s bohemian New York, hip hop, and graffiti arts; Marsalis—the burgeoning aesthetic renaissance in jazz in the early 1980s, Cobain’s redefinition of rock in the 1990s, and Badu as one of the leading lights of the new soul movement of the 1990s. All represent conscious expressions which defined ideas about the meaning of their arts, their society, and a loyal audience base.

Basquiat, more than the others, cuts across music, meanings, and shapes with an aesthetic that significantly defined his voice. His artistry is something of a mix of avant-garde graffiti hip hop meets Jackson Pollock, shaped by Picasso, flavored significantly with the tragic inner pain and twisted imagery of Frida Kahlo, and brushes of the bold cartooned poignancy of a Romare Beardon. Basquiat played in a band named Gray as well. He may be one of the last of Black image artists who represents the merging of a populist aesthetic, bubbling with the youth dynamics of social protests, yet resonating as both iconic and anti-commercial simultaneously. Basquiat’s work connects to other aesthetic movements of rage and rebellion from 1950s bohemia, to Warhol’s pop art, to punk, grunge, and hip hop. His aesthetic claimed

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urban landscapes, clothes and fashions, arrested originality, and individual voice, yet it was Afrocentric and antiestablishment. His SAMO moniker and philosophy held, “SAMO as new art form. SAMO as an end to mind wash religion, nowhere politics, and bogus philosophy . . . SAMO as an escape clause. SAMO as an expression spiritual love. SAMO as an end to confining art terms. Riding around in daddy’s convertible trust fund company.”

It is hard to say whether Basquiat, with such a short life, represented a youthful adherence to older socialist, bohemianism rhetoric or a fully worked out aesthetic philosophy. But what is clear is that the expression of his artwork mirrors in design an attention to his craft as an artist, linked within themes, commitment, and a consistency that resonate throughout his dynamic work as a painter of striking originality.

If original voice, looks, sound, and the convicted meaning in artists’ work defines art with impact, I find the tracing of the griot throughout the development of Black music performing history to be the most compelling and helpful image for artists to understand Black music. If we look back to the opening of the twentieth century, we see that several major shifts took place: American popular culture rose in prominence and was used to define American identity; artists nurtured and carried that new sentiment—identity; and improvisation was the new expressive staple, a soloist’s art of invention, individuality, expressiveness, and lively rhythm.

—William C. Banfield, *Cultural Codes*, 2009

You get all this and great creative personalities who embolden us with their art and genius, and who teach us how to live in a very complicated world, which, without their workings, would have been a totally different place by now, and a bit less humane.

The applicable thing is, if you were going to teach a group of artists how to study, explore, and engage a community to explore its music, practices, rituals, and values, how might that happen, and to what end would it serve?

Secondly, how would everybody benefit from the engagement? If you were going to write some new music, a production, what kind of “extra musical” training or approaches would enrich the process that provided you with materials to draw from that made the music better suited, better dressed? What kind of concert would sell and inspire people to participate in more activities or art?

Approaches, Methods and Meaning

In those days it was either live with music or die with noise, and we chose rather desperately to live.

—Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*

I think what Black Arts [movement] did was inspire a whole lot of Black people to write. Moreover, there would be no multiculturalism movement without Black Arts. Latinos, Asian Americans, and others all say they began writing as a result of the example of the 1960s. Blacks gave the example that you don't have to assimilate. You could do your own thing, get into your own background, your own history, your own tradition, and your own culture. I think the challenge is for cultural sovereignty, and Black Arts struck a blow for that.

—Ishmael Reed

I am trying to share in a way that inspires talking about our music/arts as a way of being in the world creatively, which means creating, sharing, engaging, and performing as expressions that connect more concretely to people for reasons of illuminating the human condition and inspiring others. And I think this is a “craftsperson’s work” of artistry. Some may have an elitist notion of this; I don’t. If you are a musician, you make music, you sit down and conceptualize tones and rhythms and harmonies to tell human stories. This is straight-up more about a conscious engagement than can be shown in any way as a methodology.

Frankly, there’s so much in motion today, you shoot yourself in the foot to try and think there is an approach that will stick in such shifting sands of change. As a composer, this could mean crafting works that are made up of music that connects to something real—like, what does it mean to have a commission that examines the history of a community and celebrates a local poet’s work? Is there a method of how one might do this? No, there is not.

Guthrie Ramsey in *Race Music* writes:

I attempt to forward a poetics of this music that explains some of the circumstances and consequences of its power and its relevance for specific historically situated listeners. My poetics of “race music,” as I call it, speculates on how the interplay of the backgrounds of audiences,

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musicians, critics, and scholars might inform the creation and reception of the music. . . .

I weave through a number of theoretical, methodological, and intellectual concerns in this study: ethnographic perspectives, historicism, cultural memory, practice theory, and self-reflectivity, among other tools that I use to engage musical analysis, interpretation, and criticism. . . . I believe there is value in exploring the historical grounding of my own musical profile. . . . I hope to give some idea about how I learned that music possesses a power; in particular, the power to mean something important about the world around me.

The shared idea here is that an engagement from artists takes into account that this work matters and what it means because it is a part of the world and the environments we contribute to and are informed by. Like the Ramsey quote, this is an interdisciplinary approach that hopes to enable a critical discussion of the multiple meanings of contemporary expression and its makings.

By examining the work, symbols, and interviews with artists, all of which contribute to our cultural landscapes, I try to make linkages between the vernacular, art, cross-mixes with popular culture, aesthetics, and musical practices that illustrate how these expressions sound out. Culture is a living system of current expressions that are critical to current and historical practices and to shaping forward directions. The analysis is one thing, but our process forward is most important in a creative enterprise.

Painting and dance production are also expressive arts that come from these deeper spaces of thinking and being in the world as artists. Somehow, each arts approach is developed out of these same concerns and connections. These interests are not driven by profit or competitions but truly by people given creative gifts who develop their work to be the best executors of their craft, commitment, and training.

The idea is that through overall, intradisciplinary discussions our works are tied to that kind of dedicated, principled approach and meaning. This all may sound pedantic or obvious, juvenile for some, but honestly, given the plethora of stuff going on today, it is not always a given that everybody at the table is having an experience grounded in the passions and dedication of artistry. We are missing a larger conversation across disciplines and above the banter of saturated media. There is something about the history of great musicians and artists and that long line of

mentoring and apprenticeship that provided a tradition of creatives who were committed to upholding the traditions.

So much of that has been shortcut by technology, gadgets, and games of show and commerce that the old-fashioned, hardworking, and soul-spirit-invested artistry seems outdated sometimes.

There are in all communities great training programs and lessons and schools and ensembles and directors and teachers and players of all sorts who engage in their craft. There is a pedagogy in place and in play in classrooms by educators across the country that is effectively teaching and training young people with measured and great results. But we don't talk loud enough about what that entails. So the approach to musicology is to actively be engaging in making the arts now.

Musicology, in general, can be thought of as the study and exploration of the history of music making. The ethno part and -ologizing is doing music of cultures and "in culture." And in recent decades, "cultural studies" has become a separate exploration of the empowerment (power) of people through the engagement of identity, cultural expression, image construction, ethnicity, race, class, and sexuality.

These ideas are constructed categories over time, but through them we look out for where power, commerce, politics, and institutions degrade the agency of people in time. This is the idea of hegemony, systematic control over others, or the rage against an industry that prohibits or curtails creative people.

All these discussions are important to the history of the arts, because the arts rise to provide sustained expression for people in specific times of triumph, peril and reflection, ritual and pleasure. So popular music and contemporary practices, forms, methods, or productions that make that work available to people are all a part of how music has more concrete meaning.

What it means to be involved in this, in what ways people are moved, and how that creative work reaches and impacts culture is what this book is about.

My belief is that at all levels across the divided camps and studies and disciplines, a healthier world of arts is one where there are more interactions and intersections among us, sharing what the experience of music, art, and thinking is in creative fields. For the musician, this means how we are really making music in the world today.

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Of course, there are established conferences, journals, magazines, web pages, and blogs. However, changing the paradigm from workshop talk to a better way of providing fine arts that mean something and connect creatively is what I have found is missing from our “gated and guarded” circles just among ourselves. And frankly, all the old paradigms are shifting; there is a completely new generation in place that values less the “old standards,” which could be good or could be problematic. So in these action essays, these log entries, I want to illustrate what it is for me being out in the field and trying to connect in these ways that we are saying is vital, just as one example. There are many workers in our fields and many stories to be told.

No prescription of methods here, just the idea that we are all doing music, productions, teaching, arranging, collaborating, and being about sharing what these tasks are and how the products are brought about. Reciprocity is the measure of methods, actually; people are benefitting from the discussions, making music, giving the performances. So we have to talk with the community, see what people are feeling, how they are reacting, and see if there are measurable differences in the ways that people are inspired by the art. We have to record the rituals.

The artists should record what people are doing in their communities. Qualitative analysis—that is, a description, a song that records how people are living and that helps to specify these moments—puts a handle and a reason on the triumphs, struggles, and celebrations.

I’m not trying to pretend to have a methodology for what works but am simply raising questions. The idea here is that more discussion and debate about common problems in our fields and objectifying what the end results might be make for great music and art that connects.

And then we must share what those practical applications are of talking with folks. This raises, I feel, an appreciable amount of discussion and makes real the notion that music/art is more than an entertainment product but a thread that sustains where people are thriving in communities. That’s it. The deliverables are CDs, concerts, after-school training programs, creating a new work in a community, raising the money for a concert series, doing a demo and posting a film about the process, commissioning works to celebrate communities, arts installations, how all this is working, and what it means to people. And in these essay pieces,

I believe, there are examples of how people are doing this kind of work. But we don't talk about them.

How do we talk about the process of creation, what that means, and how does our work connect with the communities we all live in? To me, this raises the level of work that is creative and maximizes the focus on work that matters, and not just on spectacles whose sole purpose is to make a profit. If the work is good and the people are moved, then artists will make money; it increases their marketability, they reach, and they are relevant. But this way, artists set the priorities, and the benefits are proven by their impact of how our work reaches people. To me, that is a great discussion to be having among creative people. So the discussion of music making in communities around the country, Cuba, and the reflections in these essays from "history snapshots" (jazz age, Harlem Renaissance, the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians [AACM], the rise of hip-hop in Cuba) to interviews with other artists, and their ideas about the world we are living in, are all a focused attempt to illustrate how creative people today are engaging in the workings of artistry.

Coda Box

Summary sentence: Instead of "methods," this is rather a way of sharing how we talk about what the process of creation was, what that meant, and how that work connects with the communities we all live in. This raises the level of work that is creative and maximizes the focus on work that matters, not on spectacles that sell solely for profit. This way, artists set the priorities.

Terms

Assessment:	A measure of how and why it mattered.
Ethnology:	Folks.
Hegemony:	Watching out for who and what controls.
Methodology:	What you did, consistently, to good effect.
Pedagogy (teaching):	Teaching approaches.

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Phenomenology:	What happens.
Philosophy of approach:	Your guiding ideas when you are doing.
Practical application:	How it connects, really.
Qualitative analysis:	What actually happened.
Reciprocity:	All share and receive.
Relevancy:	How things matter to people.
Ritual:	What the people and artists did, together.

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POPULAR MUSIC CULTURE

How to Teach and Reach within Popular Music

Over the centuries, artistic creativity has been variously attributed to divine inspiration, madness, intuitive genius, unnamable life, and cosmic forces. It may be most useful to creativity in terms of engagement, because the artist loves what she is doing, knows what she is doing, and has faith in what she is doing—in the committed activity we call art-making. The three elements of creativity . . . are loving, knowing and doing; or heart, mind and hands . . . great faith, great questions, and great courage.

—Eric Maisel, *Artists Speak*

We do not study the artifacts and events of popular culture as ends in themselves . . . but as a means of examining the underlying cultural mindset which those artifacts and events both reflect and mold.

—Jack Nachbar and Kevin Lause, *Popular Culture*

Music raises the soul of man higher than the so-called external form of religion. . . . That is why in ancient times the greatest prophets were great musicians.

—Hazrat Inayat Khan, *The Mysticism of Sound and Music*

Education Philosophy

Music and humanities education is an extremely engaging and fulfilling study that guarantees guidance and shaping in education from many angles. The study of the arts is not just “extra-curricular,” it is essential curricular. There is no doubt about it: When young people and artists study creative history in music, the arts, literature, film, dance, and the humanities, they are tapped into a “full history” of important movements in ideas, personalities, and creative

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enterprises that shaped history and will inspire young people to participate and contribute to the world they live in.

One of the greatest achievements in terms of the expressive culture of modernity is popular music. Creative movements—from hip-hop to civil rights to bebop to the Harlem Renaissance, from the blues to Ornette Coleman and his free jazz—are the outgrowth of young creative thinkers who pressed forward and used innovative expression to propel their own identities and create solutions that touched lives and increased participatory citizenry.

I believe we have to teach and share with people to value ideas and expressions, to understand the importance of living with the creation of ideas, and to believe that music inspires and makes room for ideas—then people will learn they live within creative environments from which their living and ideas emerge, and that music is inextricably bound with how people want to live in the world. “Cultural relevance” is the formula for arts survival, and the way to show how music and creative arts are connecting.

Contemporary music education ought to equip musicians to think about a sense and place of themselves as artists participating and contributing in culture. I encourage younger artists to think critically about the meaning of what their art is, from the standpoint of an individual, a critical, creative thinker. Artistic identity is important. Who am I as a creator? This “music culture view” is a journey through a “cultural studies lens” that explores artistry, identity, history, values, and spiritual-social-political planes.

One of the purposes of an arts-centered curriculum is to engage and refine the thinking and the development of the “inner-core soul,” to ensure we equip students with opportunities to consider these ideas. Hopefully, contributing to society as citizens, or being sociopolitically aware, won’t seem so distant from their musical life experience.

The teaching role is really to lead as a tour guide, pulling together an illustrative narrative, an overview, that is reflective again of the artistry and the social movements that gave rise to music.

Today, a global worldview is absolutely essential to our vitality as artist-citizens. Artists and educators need to be in touch with these impulses, with a multiethnic world and a host of strategies and views found in contemporary culture, artistic creation, production, education, and

business. Educational programming that broadens the understanding, definition, and direction of contemporary music culture is the direction the academy must continue to take.

A discussion about appreciating—and, as well, the use, meaning, and power of popular culture expressions, despite its growth out of mega-commodity interest—provides a way to read the contemporary world. Even though its tail is wagged and held by industry, popular culture still reflects and expresses all kinds of trappings of where we are. And these things are important to us and for us as mirrors. It is impossible to be an artist and not be shaped by the winds of popular culture, TV, and media influence on our thinking. And it is our thinking about the world we live within and shape that is the philosophical and pedagogical paradigm here that is the focus of discussion.

Educational programming that broadens the understanding, definition, and direction of contemporary music culture is the direction the academy must continue to take.

This is addressed to two groups: the artists, who are thinking about how, why, and where our work connects, and the educators, the griots, who are teaching about culture and its uses, meaning, and application to education.

So much of what comes out of us through our belief systems, our art, or political ideology has been shaped by and through popular culture. It's how we seek many of our definitions and is a part of a national expression. We in the United States are "a popular culture people." In music, it would be impossible to separate the art part from the pop part—they are born together. But the issue is not the expression; it's the control, meaning, and impact of the expression that could be discussed more fully. People today are creative all over the place, and music too abounds, but whose hands are controlling the music and what are people truly after?

Unfortunately, people want "stuff," a thing that's been sold, marketed, and made available to them and that provides a fast fix to a sugar-coated sound, image, or identity that really has very little do with music or art.

This symptom, this critique, is not new. What's inevitable is the coming together of artists to decide in what ways they will band together and take the music back, and reject all the industry-created directions, which are counterintuitive. What we see today with a lot of technology use is people having in their hands electronic tools where they can, to some

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extent, create all kinds of music, beats, productions, and have some electronic web-based dispensing ability.

Yet the fields due to this market tech-self access are overcrowded and there's so much stuff that nobody can tell anymore what is good, bad, or "what's needs or what weeds" (that is, bad growth). So the challenge to all concerned is to harness all this energy but try to focus on creating good usable materials (creative expressions) or studying good materials that are inspiring and prioritizing the meaning and use of all these things. I think the examination of history is one of our best treasures, because it addresses what works, what failed, and why. How was excellence achieved? Who were the examples? How were people moved? What were the consequences? What gave rise to the movements? Why did any of that really matter? And how do we create, and talk about, the new forms, the ways that make sense to us?

Music, Artistry, and Movements

The media of communication available to a culture are a dominant influence on the formation of the culture's social and intellectual preoccupation. . . . Our languages are our media. Our media are our metaphors. Our metaphors create the content of our culture.

—Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*

One of the greatest achievements in terms of expressive culture of modernity is popular music. Much of the music of the '60s, '70s, and '80s (social protest/soul, funk, reggae, rap, punk) was made by young musicians (Jimi Hendrix, Nina Simone, John Lennon, Bob Marley, Carole King), people who were using their music to respond to world challenges—not primarily market demands and technology's access.

Music was their combined cultural and social voice. These were young people who had a vested interest in, at least on the surface and on stage, what was going on in the world. "What's going on" becomes one kind of banner song. Such a study of how ideas over the decades have come through original artistry reveals a practice that when there is a higher percentage of focused, dedicated music/art makers, this work connects, sustains, and impacts. Anything less is over in a night or a week or two of

pop radio play. If we looked at popular culture expression over time, what can this give us?

1. The study of popular culture is a way for us to examine realistically the world, and the cultures we live in. Because music, film, and arts grow out of expressive needs, they are maps of society but can also exemplify, in the best sense of the word, “to serve,” as it shows how the expressions critically shaped important parts of our history or gave it meaning. In this way, we are introduced to a host of engaging, meaningful, innovative individuals who changed the world through their creative expressions.
2. Music and arts in popular studies allow us to examine and critique culture and use it to expose agreed-upon ills and yet also promote human exchange that matters. The exploration of cultural movements provides inspiring models of creative productivity.

At their core, music and arts are about progressive citizenship. Examples like *This Land Is My Land* (Woody Guthrie), *Think, Think, Think, Think About* (Aretha Franklin), *Imagine* (John Lennon), *Man in the Mirror* (Michael Jackson), and *White America* (Eminem) can encourage a mass reflective, not passive, thinking.

Or there are pieces that promote engagement: *Wake Up Everybody, No More Sleeping in Bed* (Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes), or *The Times They Are a-Changin’* (Bob Dylan). These kinds of songs become what I have called “banner songs.” They hold up, by singing up, excellence and meaning within the human experience concretely.

These songs and expressions create real community among groups of committed listeners who sing, believe, hope, and think in terms of concrete and real values of human meaning. Art leaves us and gives us impressions and valuable information. Music, art, poetry, and dance in these important ways are in our popular culture as viewpoints about living.

As a musician, you see this kind of ideological relevance and connection every day. It’s real. That view is not a light comment but a critical call to hear and to be about things. These reasons make those views and

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representations not random but rare, cherishable, of value, and of marked significance.

Folk music—the blues, for instance—is the merging of a powerful sacred/secular music that means “pure human individual expression” of common everyday folks, shared in and among groups of people who have shared worldviews. And this shows, if only in that meeting of the heart and mind through that phrase, lyric, or beat. These should be thought of as languages, specific special forms that allow you to speak through it musically, to stand in for and represent authentic human impulses, feelings, and ideas. There is still an important contemporary relevance here. Younger people, or first-time hearers of the blues, for instance, might not feel this in the music, but when they hear about the stories and experience the older men and women who talk about the music like it’s a deeper worldview, this really connects.

If we look back at history, the singers spoke publicly on matters that “invited others in.” It was not an exclusive language, it was poetry, which invites reflection.

Nobody needs censorship, but artists always have “good sense.” Songs are craft driven—that’s why they stand for, represent, and mean things.

Other Materials in Popular Culture and Reflective Themes in Cultural Studies

Such an inquiry into expressive relevance in culture extends beyond just music makers, of course. A group exploring the benefits of studying popular culture artifacts could view select films, look through different kinds of magazines, and use these as a very rich meter of how to read what’s actively projected in popular cultural expression. Magazines, for example, are wonderful things to open up and study because the images, advertisements, and the way these materials speak to common impulse issues reveal these materials as significant because they highlight what’s valued. This is a useful link to a history and as a way to examine the ongoing relationship between media, music, and society. This provides other creative models and points of reference, data, and good discussion of a “picture of” the world we live in. These points are relevant to getting to what students see as valued and worthy. What is here are central core values, the ideas car-

ried and espoused by popular culture materials, artists, and general culture in each era. There are tons of things to discuss that are positive, actually, and these materials are impactful and illustrative in teaching. In a more critical way, reflections of our most soiled ideas manifest themselves too. The problem is that the assumption of the ad is that this is how we as a public want to be represented or that it reflects what we need. To flip that, our culture could be more demanding of what things are better offered for our deeper selves.

This is why art and humanities provide more substantive ways to engage these ideas. This makes consumers less willing to accept just “any old anything” that the market sells.

One helpful view is to set these explorations into American popular culture studies, helping to think about larger issues on the discipline tracks of social and popular cultural studies where themes such as image, sexuality, class, race, politics, and aesthetics can be examined.

Secondly, using inquiries in conjunction with critical questions can be applied to daily/weekly newspapers, magazines, or Internet postings as a barometer for what’s relevant in contemporary culture. Textbooks cannot respond to the everyday world around us. Everything young people see and hear could be tied to exploring what’s relevant as it’s carried in some form of popular culture. One can illustrate how education themes are greatly emphasized, held up in these materials. Some of the big questions about how to talk, teach, create, and think about culture specifically are: What does it mean? How does it work? How can we trace that meaning and mattering in modern culture? The term, again, that is most helpful is *cultural relevance*.

Following is a list of helpful themes for discussions that grow out of such digging into popular culture materials:

- Cultural studies, and how these expressions connect with image, culture, negotiating, race, class, gender, sexuality, power, and identity
- Cultural contexts
- Arts, social movements, politics, social action (jazz age, Harlem Renaissance, social protest, hip-hip, Seattle grunge movement, and Internet age)

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- Innovation, creativity
- Artists as culture refiners, carriers
- Arts linked with music, poetry, painting, and dance
- National culture
- Individual voice
- Technology that carries the music
- Media that mechanizes the imagery
- Agency, empowerment of people to do something
- Role of artist, responsibility, accountability

Education Philosophy: Some ABCs Pedagogy of Contemporary Teaching

In a recent TED PBS special on education, hosted by John Legend, several general ideas about contemporary challenges and thrusts in education were spotlighted. Educator Rita Pierson shared, among other things, the knowledge that kids drop out because of poverty, low self-esteem, and poor peer associations, and that relationships are key. There is power in connection and community. She added that kids don't learn from people they don't like, and that we have to learn simple things, like simply apologizing when we are wrong. Oftentimes, teachers simply need to say at the end of instruction, "I love you, thank you for bringing you here today." Teaching and learning should bring joy, and—I agree with Pierson—educators are born to make a difference.

Creating that "womb of engagement" is essential in making students feel "safe and encouraged" to excel in all directions. This ethnomusicologizing approach has to do with a type of pedagogy that is holistic, that considers the engagement of people, ideas, and culture so that it sprouts expressive creative work, with sustainable measurement and an educational impact.

In another TED talk, educator Ramsey Musallam further shared that teachers are cultivators of curiosity, and that understanding allows a

student to have a love and familiarity with the subjects. Sir Ken Robinson talked about three principles for success in human endeavors in education:

1. Human beings are diverse.
2. Human beings/learners have curiosity.
3. Human life is always creative.

Robinson says that “Children are natural learners. . . . What great teachers also do is mentor, stimulate, provoke, engage. You see, in the end, education is about learning. If there’s no learning going on, there’s no education going on. And people can spend an awful lot of time discussing education without ever discussing learning. The whole point of education is to get people to learn.”

The study of creative movements, artistry, and innovative thinkers who connected, changed, and further inspired people is illustrative of the best and most eclectic mix of all this.

I speak often of the five Cs in creative engagement:

- Commitment (Teaching music history illustrates the artistic benefit of long-term investment.)
- Caring (Students have to know that art is about love and caring.)
- Connectedness (Showing how music connects with people is important.)
- Community (Movements like Harlem Renaissance, social protest, Haight-Ashbury, CBGB’s punk, and hip-hop music illustrate that musicians belong to a community of artistry.)
- Cultivating craft (The beboppers were critically concerned with their craft as musicians, to “play.” Musical excellence is essential; hip-hoppers battle to illustrate control and fluidity of their rhyme and flow.)

The best disciplines that accompany the area of listening are the histories of music creation, styles, and artistry. I ask younger musicians,

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“Given all you’ve seen with today’s world, with regard to entertainment and music in your marketplace, what kind of contribution would you like to make with your music, your work? What are you really doing to make that happen?”

At the last beat of the day, they have to determine their own way in this world. It’s our job to introduce good paths and to inspire and encourage them to make good choices. Holding up the best examples of artistry makes the points very real and visible to them.

We live in a “visual info-tech-valued literature world of pictures and sound,” and these sources—used properly—are very rich.

Unfortunately, the “mainstreamed most popular artistry” today has been reduced in musical and ideological source materials, so that artistic craft and imagination no longer rule. We have to do visual transcription and decoding and cultural deconstruction with our students to get them to see under and through the visuals and media-pitched narrative to get at the values there for usage for making great music happen. And in this way it is a thrilling engagement of images, music, history, and educational themes to sift and discuss through.

There’s a lot of value in the sifting through, and here is an opportunity to deal with the most pressing issues, concepts, and approaches that arm young artists: their craft, identity, and ability to create a viable, meaningful, and sustaining life as a contributing young artist.

Sea of Popular Expression and Understanding

Because the forms of human feeling are much more congruent with the musical forms than with the forms of language, music can reveal the nature of feelings with a detail and truth that language cannot approach.

—Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*

We are living in a sea of popular expression, understanding, and reading that becomes a very powerful way to view our cultural environments. On the other side is the understanding of the creative expression from the songwriter, artist, composer, the performer’s perspective, and reading the history of that working. When we approach sharing and engaging our own work and its value, it is critical to have, if nothing else, an evolving philosophical grounding. The definition, role, and meaning of art, its role

and connection to society, our methods, process, and approach of creating are all paradigms of thought that have been fussed over for generations among contemporary artists, aestheticians, and educators. But these values, paradigms, and even definitions of what's good, bad, ugly, and beautiful have shifted.

Are these creative items and workers today a product of reflections of our society, or a construction of permanent projections onto a society that we all have to read and understand? Music and humanities education is an extremely engaging and fulfilling study that guarantees guidance and shaping in education from these many angles. The study of the arts, as I have stated, is not just *extra*-curricular, it is *essential* curricular. So some discussion of why we do what we do as creatives, what the purpose of the song is, the process of the work, and what it means to us are important questions.

If I had to boil this down to end-of-day scenarios, it would be:

1. Share explorative creative journeys in the forms of a discussion of the music and artistry, teaching an aesthetic philosophy. It's important and useful to have and work with traceable ideas, approaches to music and culture.
2. Make useable, teachable linkages of themes and approaches between teaching history, culture, humanities, and liberal arts by encouraging an interdisciplinary narrative.

The Classes: The Griot Circle

Sharing is critical in education or engaging artistry. In my classes, we all sit in what I call the griot circle. This great West African ancient role, where the artists are culture bearers, history sharers, and culture carriers, is a very powerful model. We spend time reading, watching, listening, and in discussions of the music and the culture and its impact with the understanding that the room is a kind of womb of truths that are spun as the result of the engagement we are committed to for 12–15 weeks. In this way, what we say we are studying is what we understand we are doing. The two big disciplinary areas that drive this approach to musicology are sociology and theology. Black music has been one critical bloodline, clock,

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and map for Black people and for the world, and one of the most pervasive musical artistries known. I teach courses about the history, culture, and meaning of that music, its artistry, and its social/cultural impact in modern society. This view posits that the development of American society, and the following modern contemporary culture as a whole, can be viewed as a dynamic exploration through the lens of music.

I named this course “The Sociology of Black Music in American Culture.” I start with West African griot tradition, arguing for a functional communicative expression that employs craft, culture carrying, creativity, and hearing/doing and that manifests an artistry that posits artistic responsibility. If you trace that line dictated by numerous African retentions (griot, community, participation, rhythmic dynamism, improvisation), you see the diasporic construction of an incredible music tradition and artistry that stands tall in human achievement.

So musically what follows as you teach this is: Africa/music in the diaspora, Cuba/Brazil, spirituals, blues, New Orleans/early jazz, Duke to modern, gospel, Harlem Renaissance/concert music, early rock, R&B, soul, reggae, hip-hop, and urban contemporary.

I also teach a course titled “The Theology of American Popular Music,” as an exploration of that inspiration seen in artistry and movements carried by musicians’ work and its spiritual, social, and cultural effect in modern society. The idea is that music is inwardly driven to imbue its creators and that drive is effervescent and inextricably bound with and connected to human, social, and spiritual meaning and effect.

My courses examine these ideas and follow the work and musical movements to illustrate this idea. The question I pose to my students is: What drives or informs your artistry? What, then, are music, message, and meaning, its connection with other musicians and to an audience? What do you see your art being? I argue and persuade that the best study is to look at and listen critically to artistry, music, style, lyrics, and the social/cultural contexts.

Again, the broad view is that creative expression and music are movements of ideas in culture, that history is seen as a continuum of ideas, and that culture is a creative response within that continuum. We explore connected themes, such as retentions, griot identity, value transfer, and artistic responsibility.

I develop a line of teaching creative jazz history as well, critically linking its exploration to movements in popular culture and artistry, and jazz to the field of composition. In other words, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Charlie Christian, Les Paul, Miles Davis, Buddy Guy, and Prince are all connected to Jimi Hendrix and the innovations of electronic sound. In jazz, Scriabin, Debussy, Ravel, and Stravinsky share in a connectivity of ideas in sonority, culture, and theme construction with Ellington, T. J. Anderson, Ornette Coleman, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, Gil Evans, and Maria Schneider.

I may explore a theory of culture or move to the spirituals as political/social creativity, or jazz as creative liberation, or blues as a New Orleans expression from the deeper South that migrates and moves to Chicago, New York, St. Louis, Kansas City, and that a more modern move could be Ornette and free jazz, that then ferments into a fusion that is funky, hip and hops. I also look at the work of Woody Guthrie, Gil Evans, Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, Ani DiFranco, Kurt Cobain, and Kanye West as examples of this same connected, young creative enterprise that dips from that same functional trough.

Many times younger students don't know the blues, or its structure, or how it connects to Africa and then to the South. They don't know links from spirituals, gospel, then to jazz; they don't know Black church (African retentions) traditions. In short, they don't quite get the need for the connection to much before 1980. So music with personal life passions is not their driving idea for music. It's quite impossible to have any of this popular music without these cultural voices, experiences, and expressions. So you have to let them see the history through the evolution of musicians' stories and bios, in the cultural context of the development of the music, in real forward-style development.

Then they get it.

Bios in Music

I teach a course on biographies of musicians. You can learn the most from studying what musicians did and how they became; exploring that process and their music is an invaluable study. We need to study the soil from which artists grow and the social/societal cultural world they inhabit, or

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music is reduced to microwave pop production. The sauce, the scrapes, and the successes are what makes music “sound.” These kinds of people/artists were not just “pop celebrities”; these artists were icons in culture because of what their music and work meant to people as the music shaped lives and ideas and contributed to real problems and joys in the world.

In my Bios and American Popular Theology/Sociology courses, I look at film documentaries and biography clips of Quincy Jones, Sweet Honey in the Rock, Bessie Smith, Mary Lou Williams, Sarah Vaughan, Patrice Rushen, Herbie Hancock, Nat King Cole, Sammy Davis Jr., Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan, Billie Holiday, Duke Ellington, Thomas Dorsey, Mahalia Jackson, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Earth Wind and Fire, Wattstax, the Funk Brothers, Florence Price, William Grant Still, Paul Robeson, Monk, Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, Sun Ra, Miles Davis, Jimi Hendrix, Chuck Berry, Muddy Waters, Bob Marley, Marvin Gaye, Tupac, punk/grunge, Kurt Cobain, Michael Jackson, James Brown, Stevie Wonder, and Prince.

The Harlem Renaissance is a great example of collaborative connections among younger and older artists; although politics, merchandising, and cultural machinery were present, the process and end product were about young artists’ ideas.

It is a beacon period of artistry. Jazz (Ellington), poetry (Langston Hughes), art, literature (Zora Neale Hurston, Arna Bontemps), dance (Katherine Dunham), and social citizenry (Paul Robeson) and cultivation of the soul was its focus. What was left behind was great art and the expression of progressive ideas that stand and sustain. The other lesson here is that culture is connective, and artists by and large are accountable to that thread that links them and their work in and to the world their art is being borne out of. In critical ways, your art informs and connects to the same human values and needs of common folk, but as well other artists and artistry.

These are the kinds of issues that really address what is going on; knowing what this music is about, how it got there, and what kinds of market definitions and cultural relative determinatives are in place keep this form of expression linked, almost exclusively, to this way of being in the world. Popular culture carries the weight of the society too, and its pictures are not always pretty.

People assume popular culture has little beneath its surface, but that's not a true picture of popular culture. Most of the issues raised in this writing come to a more rich manifestation, analysis, and application when you can look deeper into a piece of music, poetry, a movie, a magazine advertisement, and strip away the surface layers of the photos, the text, the images, and certainly the music. For me as a teacher, I want to explore the broad terrain of artistic expression to appreciate the artistry but also to explore this creativity in relation to its meaning related to living and shaping human history.

My interests primarily lie in education, to empower and imbue artists with a sense of what it means to inspire people, to be a sounding example of what it is to possess the gift of expressive artistry, and to be accountable for that artistic responsibility.

Reading and dancing with contemporary popular culture expression is essential, as is learning to use it as a tool for better positioning your art to connect, to be market relevant, and to always be able to gauge where the people are. The future of the arts relies on our ability to manage both of these efforts effectively, reading the culture and remaking the present creatively so the culture can read and move itself forward.

Meanings: More Arguments, Problems, and Examples of a New Aesthetics for Culture

White folks don't understand about the blues. They hear it come out, but they don't know how it got there. They don't understand that's life's way of talking. You don't sing to feel better. You sing 'cause that's a way of understanding life.

—Ma Rainey

The future of music may not lie with music itself, but rather in the way it . . . makes itself a part with the finer things that humanity does and dreams of.

—American composer Charles Ives

This “new aesthetic” about popular culture is one of the biggest, most fluid, and complex discussions within educational circles today. Within the

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growing interest in contemporary popular culture, and seeing pop culture as an impulse that matters for educational practice, people are shuffling to make it work for them. It's a sexy talk. Even churches want to look at how to make use of this explosion of media and cultural madness. But, in my view, not enough is being done to draw good, useful, and balanced lines of argument for the support of the worth of contemporary culture educationally, and no one is willing to step up and be politically incorrect or be read as a snob or outdated or insensitive, if they take a stab at popular culture. So the discussions are lopsided and counterproductive or ill engaging.

Popular culture studies are certainly not new, nor are debates about meaning and relevance—all old territory. But there is in place moving toward the third decade of the 21st century a more dominating, market-aggressive pop culture.

Those who believe “popular culture is all right” allow too much at the expense of free speech or artistic rights. On the other hand, those who are “unwilling to see it” (because popular culture is not canonized or simply because its “popular”) don't take enough time to consider forms outside of comfort zones, or apply any critical interpretive thought to why a rap song is relevant or a popular arts and entertainment magazine has good articles that are intellectual stimulating.

A relevant argument is that we are in a new era; many of the old models and cultural sites need to be dusted out and revamped.

References are constantly being made to media studies, advertising, the creative use of digital technology in film and video, the growing pervasiveness of celebrities who speak for us on matters of importance from milk, politics, and policy to the best information systems. All this forces us to recon with (“recognize”) that popular culture rhetoric is everywhere! Cross- and interdisciplinary approaches give teachers the tools to be able to articulate what's happening. There are some who do this intuitively, but there is a need to have more discourse to equip educators to incorporate and interpret these things. This is painful because so much of our grounding keeps us locked in and it is discomfoting to let go. There is a new philosophy needed, and our young people won't hear all of the old patterns. Contemporary culture is at least grounded in a worldview that a majority of our society reads and understands.

In his film *Representation and the Media*, Stuart Hall focuses on the politics of image and culture representation, and he encourages a more

active role in thinking through the implications of what is communicated through culture. He recognizes that these questions and this “interrogation of culture” help us play an important role in gaining knowledge and control over what we are fed and decidedly shaped by.

With the convergence of impulses in entertainment, business, information technology, and media, our media culture is pervasive and cannot be ignored. The impact—pervasiveness of popular culture on our contemporary thinking—despite the critique, perhaps can as well be pointed to as a compelling moment when creative outlooks are to be taken seriously in the world, with a healthy, open-minded interpretation.

Those who are involved in teaching are constantly looking for ways to bring examples of creative personalities and movements to the classroom experience so that we can link young people with the relevant impulses—social, educational, and political—and help them to understand the shifts in worlds they enter and exit through. Impacting students with ways to process and think about sustaining focus, work, and life commitments is one of our great challenges in the discipline of humanities’ evolution, curriculum enhancement, and revision, and it’s just plain good-sense wisdom to share. The way of the future for education is a dynamic look at contemporary culture and these convergences, and the use of cultural studies questions helps us to focus on the higher and lower frequencies in society. The “inescapable web of mutuality” that Dr. King spoke of frighteningly takes a hold of our throats, fears, and pocketbooks. Better know the world we all live in!

I had a teacher who always told us: “Know what you believe and why you believe it.” I always held onto this. In this way, we ask about the ways that speak and reflect ideas and about how the interpreting of culture matters, and use this as a model for ways to understand life and “work in the world.” Our attempt to address these questions is seen here through the lens of music arts practices, history, and education. In particular, popular music has always been a forward-leaping forum as a contemporary cultural movement of ideas from blues poetry and rhyme to rap and beyond. It’s always in pursuit of the “now narrative,” if we listen closely and critically.

One of the most frustrating aspects of dealing with contemporary culture is its constant and rapid change. Every time we attempt to hold onto it for a moment to see what it is, let alone comment on it, it moves and changes. But you can’t sustain traditions without “calling it out,” loving it,

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and watching how it grows and changes. As educators we have to sit down at the table and look at the implications of culture in order to explore and share. The idea that you have to contain living things in pages (or a jar) in order to appreciate them is a bad one. In terms of beginning an educational discussion of the meanings and workings of an aesthetic, there have been many great writings on or about music practice and history. At some senseless point, I even tried to name some of the most important books about music/arts culture. As a starting reference, here are some “must reads” in absolutely no certain order of importance. In my own journeys, these are some of the most important books written on music culture and meaning. I’m sure many more could be added.

- *Blues People*, Leroi Jones
- *The Souls of Black Folks*, W.E.B. Du Bois
- *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*, John Miller Chernoff
- *Rhythm and Resistance*, Ray Pratt
- *The Death of Rhythm and Blues*, Nelson George
- *Hip Hop America*, Nelson George
- *The Music of Black Americans*, Eileen Southern
- *Music, Society, Education*, Christopher Small
- *The Spirituals and the Blues*, James Cone
- *Stomping the Blues*, Albert Murray
- *Music and Some Highly Musical People*, James Trotter
- *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, Harold Cruse
- *The Power of Black Music*, Samuel Floyd
- *To Be or Not . . . to Bop*, Dizzy Gillespie
- *Miles: The Autobiography*, Miles Davis and Quincy Troupe
- *A Change Is Gonna Come*, Craig Werner
- *This Is How We Flow*, Angela Nelson

- *Music Is My Mistress*, Duke Ellington
- *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame*, John Lovell
- *Fight the Power: Rap, Race, and Reality*, Chuck D
- *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop*, Guthrie Ramsey
- *One Nation under a Groove*, Gerald Early
- *We'll Understand It Better By and By*, edited by Bernice Johnson Reagon
- *Noise and Spirit: The Religious Sensibilities of Rap Music*, edited by Anthony Pinn
- *Black Noise*, Tricia Rose
- *American Popular Music*, Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman
- *She Bop: The Definitive History of Women in Rock, Pop and Soul*, Lucy O'Brien
- *Rockin' in Time: A Social History of Rock-and-Roll*, David P. Szatmary
- *The Pop, Rock and Soul Reader*, David Brackett
- *Lyrics*, Sting
- *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music*, George E. Lewis
- *Race in 21st-Century America*, Genise Rhodes-Reed, Theresa Melendez, and Curtis Stokes
- *The Jazz Trope: A Theory of African American Literary and Vernacular Culture*, Alfonso W. Hawkins Jr.
- *Buppies, B-boys, Baps, and Bobos*, Nelson George
- *In the Heart of the Beat, the Poetry of Rap*, Alexis Pate
- *Willie Dixon, Preacher of the Blues*, Mitsutoshi Inaba

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- *The Hip Hop Generation, Young Blacks and the Crisis in African-American Culture*, Bakari Kitwana
- *Cultural Codes: Makings of a Black Music Philosophy*, William C. Banfield
- *To Be an Artist: Musicians, Visual Artists, Writers, and Dancers Speak*, Camille Colatosti
- *Hip Hop's Inheritance: From the Harlem Renaissance to the Hip Hop Feminist Movement*, Reiland Rabaka
- *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy
- *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton
- *Repeal of the Blues: How Black Entertainers Influenced Civil Rights*, Alan Pomerance
- *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, Robert Farris Thompson
- *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, Neil Postman
- *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Walter Rodney
- *The Cultural Studies Reader*, Simon During
- *African Religions and Philosophy*, John S. Mbiti
- *Popular Culture: An Introductory Text*, Jack Nachbar and Kevin Lause
- *Black Talk*, Ben Sidran
- *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison
- *Black Music in Our Culture*, Dominique-René de Lerma
- *Give My Poor Heart Ease: Voices of the Mississippi Blues*, William Ferris

The Real Meaning of Arts and Music

I always hold onto, with great care, what philosopher/aesthetician Susanne K. Langer wrote: “Because the forms of human feeling are more congruent with musical form than with the forms of spoken language, music can reveal the nature of feelings with a detail and truth that language cannot approach.” Many believe that the activity of artists constitutes the creation and execution of a body of expressive works that contain a language of emotions, sensibilities, and creative impulses that have “meanings” in forms understood and communicable. In other words, this “closed language” of and by the artist has specific meanings that are congruent to the realm of human experience, emotion, and feeling.

The expressive products of the arts transcend the individual artist and as well connect to a broader range of human experiences and conditions.

These may be triumph, sorrow, great happiness, fear, wonder and excitement, passion, anger and rage, praise, or intense contemplation. There is something in creative expression that is important and very meaningful to human understanding and being. If we factor in the growing complexity of the 21st-century problems of race, class, sexual psychology, and sociology, artistic creation and what constitutes its emotional character and presentation is increasingly becoming a powerful tool as an indicator of societal stability or instability. The importance, then, of musical expression in our lives is paramount from not only the angle of its beauty and emotional, spiritual, and psychological power, but also we respond to the artist as a social agent who is inextricably bound to cultural or societal evolution.

Artists have always had equations for creativity and are sensitive to where they are contextually, in the present. There is also concern about the beyond, pushing on, commenting on, and illuminating where we may be headed. The other thing that should never be taken out of the equation for creativity is for progressive art to be committed to where people are. These things—taken together with a host of tastes, perspectives, styles, and individual genius—give us a grasp and an understanding of artists and creativity in our modern age.

In his work *Music, Society, Education*, Christopher Small wrote,

artistic activity, properly understood, can provide not only a way out of this impasse in musical appreciation, in itself an unimportant matter,

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but also an approach to the restructuring of education and perhaps of our society. Simply because the artist sets his own goals and works with his whole self—reason, intuition, the most ruthless self-criticism and realistic assessment of a situation, freely, without external compulsion and with love.

Now if we believe that what an artist does has some validity in that it communicates something of value, next someone may ask, what is the artist “saying”? Is it literal, and does it mean to be literal? Is it an informed statement or a totally free expression? Was this supposed to reflect what I believe is beautiful or lovely? Is the ugly I see, feel, hear, some definition of beauty according to the artist? Does the artist care what I care, or see, hear, or understand? Of course, these are the problems of aesthetics that have been argued over for at least a hundred years, but what is significant here is that the absorption in the artwork or experience elicits these kinds of reactions, unlike staring at a rock. There is something in the experience of artistic exchange, artist to art piece, and art piece to observer. Whatever it communicates, it is something that connects to human sensibilities, is intangible, and yet materializes in all kinds of unforeseeable actions. This is why music is thought to be so dangerous and subversive sometimes.

I don't think, for example, America really understood freedom by anything else other than what freedoms were gained due to the people's struggles and demand for it. Those demands for freedom are what America means by freedom. Those demands have been for and by the people, and it is within this context, this web of meaning, that American democracy was spun. Many have pointed to the earliest American-soil-produced freedom songs, the spirituals, with a line like “Didn't my lord deliver Daniel? And why not every man?”

Who could miss what that means? That meaning and subsequent actions transformed this country.

In the 1997 movie *Contact*, one character asks another in pursuit of an alien communication, “You'd be willing to risk your life and die for this. Why?” The real drama in the plot rested upon this very simple idea; none at first could interpret or make sense of the data sent from another planet, but the lack of comprehension was not at all the issue. What was of importance to the principal character was that something was attempting to be communicated and that brought the two worlds together. Art

has important meaning in our world because when we experience it in the form of dance, visuals, language, drama, and music, we instinctively respond with a knowingness that is above constructed principles.

It is our reaction, our innate human spirit, that yearns to be embraced, engaged, connected, and communicated with. An absence of artistic reflections in our world deprives us of a fundamental mode of human living and being that, anthropologically understood, reveals histories of peoples, prior to modern technologies, who poured who they were or where their people were into art left for interpretation, fulfillment, and record.

The Educating Point: Windows of “Theory”

John Coltrane was quoted as saying, “The main thing a musician would like to do is to give the listener a picture of the wonderful things he knows of and senses in the world.” The educating point of music and art is that it has grown as art, allowing people to see a world that’s beautiful despite the ugly picture life sometimes paints with you in it. There is a lot more being brought to the table in regard to education and the relevance of various expressive forms. The music is about impact, inspiration, protest, and power, staying “on the beat and in the groove,” having the guts, the craft, and the creative voice to say it effectively, your way, and to move somebody with that saying, that flow. This is a much more compelling way to engage creative thinking.

We are seduced by discourses that arouse passion in people, thinking about the meaning of their engagement in this life. Music is more than music. It means more than that; it counts for more than that. Composer Charles Ives wrote that “The future of music may not be with music itself but rather in the way it makes itself a part of the finer things humanity does and dreams of.” Duke Ellington, when asked about his music process, said, “This [referring to his playing the piano], this isn’t making music, this is dreaming, dreaming is what I am doing.”

Some Model Specifics

Music culture is the example of how people have—through the use of their art—achieved what they dream of, the freedom to be alive and to inspire. If,

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as a teacher, you could look at a music and, without being a musician, see constructs for order, moments of reflection, examples of mobilizing a team into action, examples of an effective group interaction and interplay, and expression of individual accomplishment or pure genius, what kind of music would you show students? We always hear about classical music being used as the example in culture, its sound, aesthetic, and method of construction as one of the best illustrations of human achievement to be inspired by and to model. They have poured a couple of million dollars into empty research and claims about the intellectual advancement that happens to babies—even in a womb—hearing Mozart. Teaching with popular music culture as discussed throughout this essay creates concrete and sustainable results.

Social/Cultural Relevance

1. The historical/cultural development of American society can be seen through the emergence of every form of American popular music (spirituals, country, blues, rock and roll, hip-hop).
2. Musicians as popular priests are a model for performance and the use of art for meaning and spiritual conviction (Thomas Dorsey, the father of gospel music; John Coltrane’s “A Love Supreme”).
3. Examples of literature, narratives, and American vernacular wisdom and poetry are in the text of most spirituals or blues songs, bluegrass, and folk.
4. Artistry with connectedness and meaning to be expressive for “people use,” the role of music in its linking with people’s “lived in” lives, is seen in Bob Marley (“Celebrate good times, come on . . .”), Kool and the Gang (“Celebration”).
5. There are several modes of thought from cultural studies frameworks that I think are important in popular musical studies:
 - Music as an expression of time, place, and spaces (personal and communal), a kind of transport into inner dimensions of the participants
 - Music as individual and collective empowerment
 - Music as a cultural/ethnic voice

How can we forget James Brown's "Say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud"? Or Miss Ross's "I'm coming out, I want the world to know, I gotta let it show"? Note the active transcendence of the works, which moved in several communities for affirmation. Who's coming out?

Culture, then, as a study, should be focused toward the realm of its ability to empower, deepen, and enlarge human experiences among many people within a society. Within the scope of the larger questions relating to our study of cultures, the study of American cultural history and expression is a search for places where identity and nationhood are being formulated, authenticated, ritualized, and represented. The exploration of these various expressions is what culture and cultural study is all about.

Music and creative culture make very real the claim that this literature—text, as it were—is the most salient example of the philosophical frameworks and worldview raised earlier, that music is the appropriate framework through which life's experiences must be examined and celebrated. Many of these questions are raised, mused about, sung, and riffed on by creative artists.

Teaching music culture provides students of many stripes and interests with a very powerful model for interpreting contemporary as well as historical social phenomena relative to class, gender, politics, spiritual expression, and identity. This sharing traces the formation of musical culture, which simultaneously influences and becomes one of the most important markers of our national identity. The focus on the interdisciplinary nature of music as a teaching subject within the humanities, using the themes in cultural studies and the idea of identity formation to broaden artistic notions of functionality, continues to be helpful.

If we are to understand cultural studies as an academic discipline that began as a search for the subjective inner voice, focusing on particularly "the marginalized and the powerlessness of the least," the following questions come in our historical context: When did the powerless speak for themselves and question the power of suffocating institutions in their own authoritative voices? The streams of consciousness, the artifacts that expressed the banner of critical inquiry, rage, and existential angst as popular music are important. In its articulation, even the larger cultural accommodations, productions, and exploitations become a product of extremely important dimensions within the cultural studies playground. We are reminded of one of the first old slave spiritual songs, "Oh Freedom": "Freedom over me!

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When I am free! An' be-fo' I'd be a slave I'll be buried in my grave an' go home to my Lord and be free." Then there is "Many Thousand Gone": "No mo auction block for me, no mo drivers lash for me, no mo peck a corn for me . . . many thousand gone . . . Steal away, steal away. I aint got long to be here." And there is also insurrection with coded plans, as in "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot": "Swing low, swing low, sweet chariot [the Underground Railroad] coming for to carry me home." In these cases, each slave song contains double meanings, cultural coding, and messages of antiestablishment sentiment with messages of hope and spiritual, physical, and political freedom and empowerment. This emphasis in cultural studies to deal with the hegemonic and suffocating effects of our society (itself a larger culture and therefore needing critique) is empowering.

As a teacher, a study of this music enriches the classroom experience as well as highlights significant movements in American history usually treated in other contexts and studies. I tell my students that speaking creatively is a way to regain ownership with who you are. This reclaiming is particularly significant if who you are has been caught up and tangled in a sticky web of history, race, economics, class struggle, and identity crisis. Sound like a common problem? It is.

These are other critical questions to be addressed—the what, who, when, where, how, and why.

- How can we define music as an important cultural phenomenon?
- What are some of the philosophical frameworks that can be appropriated from this cultural study?
- What are the causative factors (migrations, social/political/religious) that led to the development of the various kinds of music (spirituals, blues, bluegrass, bebop, folk, gospel, R&B, rock and roll, and hip-hop)?
- What does the development of popular music tell us about American society socially and culturally in terms of its evolution?
- What are some of the most powerful musical movements or artists who provide great examples of "meaningful art"?
- What are some of the great lessons that we learn from the study of this music, these artists and movements?

Looking at it this way, our collective goal is to examine and to “weave a narrative” in order to learn something meaningful and memorable about the art and lives of artists as well as the impact these expressive creations have had upon American cultural history and identity. This deepens our understanding and appreciation of aspects of the art forms, which are unique as well as universal in expression and meaning. This way of opening the wider lens reduces the perception and minimization of the cultural product and activity as mere “popular commodity.”

This is the emphasis I try to put on seeing music from a larger place: by first examining its historical/social/spiritual roots and then letting students review American aesthetic and cultural sensibilities through other sets of eyeglasses, such as race, culture, gender, and music as mass commerce and commodity.

Putting contemporary music into a cultural “sounding” emphasizes its values from these larger contexts, not merely as entertainment or diversion. As a social force within culture, artists have the ability to exorcise demons of social despair and transport folks by simply being there and being aware of joy, pain, triumph, imagination, and spirit because they operated the vehicle, the music, and the art. If there is any voice in these times that cuts across our social, racial, sexual, political, and ethnic divides, it is the cross-currents of contemporary musical artists. And by beginning with the creation and development of American popular music, students get a lot out of this and are very moved by the music. Overall, they gain a deeper understanding of navigating and exploring their own cultural spaces.

Teaching people in our society that being creative and taking time to explore one’s inner voice and thought has great rewards, but that is also its great challenge—mainly because this larger culture has reduced the importance of creative arts to mere entertainment or specialty interests. In contemporary culture, the majority of the emphasis on training for success is for gaining access to money and power in business, information technology, sales, service, and finance. But training in music, art, dance, and drama allows one to search for meaning, inspiration, and spiritual impulse, and *this* is the great example of human experience and excellence. Young people feel they are a more integral part of their success story if they are allowed to bring to a product a piece of who they are, what their story is. I think, despite our capitalistic surges, people always return back

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to the basic humanistic codes. That is what is apparent in the lure and continual draw of the popular culture rituals in music.

American music—especially those forms of jazz, folk, and contemporary popular creative works—places more value on creativity and human expression through experiences that are authentic and pure. Music as a discipline allows for and demands the opening of creative spaces, moves us back to individuality and self-critical expression. If artists proceed in these ways, which I believe they do, society sings along. In the raising up of all these individual creative voices, we have a choir expressing and creating multiple experiences of human “sounding.”

Conclusion

The work of a musician is tied into and around creative investigation. Nothing is more important in the life of an artist than the workspace of the artistic mind. What is this sound? What is it made up of? How should it be expressed? What are the standards so far? What can I bring to this? These kinds of questions, apart from what the lyrics say or how funky the groove is or how effective this passage will be, are what artists grapple with.

And lastly as this relates to a teaching theory of music, the potential for human agency, empowerment, cultural structuring with meaning, and community cohesion—this is what music teaches us as we utilize its meanings, history, and creative languages. This is the business of educating in our culture. It’s our map.

Terms

Artistic responsibility:	What artists should be doing
Progressive citizenship:	Being involved, really
Cultural studies themes:	Image/culture construction, negotiating race, class, gender, sexuality, power, and identity
African retentions:	African cultural practices, norms, values that remained
Griot:	West African musician, singer, history teller
Misogynistic core:	Degrading to women

CHAPTER FOUR (BLACK) MUSIC MATTERS

One of the things I say many times is: there is no universal music. All musical expression is predicated, created, expressed, and interpreted through the filter of human experience, which is not universal, it's specific. Music without any notion of ethnicity and culture does not exist. The reality of culture, ethnicity, image, sexuality, and protests are all filters, the expressions of human experience and reality through which all of our perceptions of music must pour through. All human experience begins with specific conditions based on everyday life, and music becomes a function of that reality, grounded in that experience—that is the universal end product of music.

Cornel West is a hero of mine, a mentor, and my friend. The hero and mentor piece is easy enough to imagine. The friend part is because he has always been there for me in everything I needed—from helping me figure out who I was attempting to be in the world and as an artist-thinker. That's a big load for someone to help you unpack. It's full of dirty laundry and wet clothes and stuff you need to throw away, and all the questions you have about the meaning of this and that, that a young person on a quest for identity has. Your parents are the first door you pass through, as they help you crawl into early stages of the world. But then there is that group of friends who are there to care, and that's another essential wing of rooms or support. Cornel West has been that for me in several ways.

I've been moved by the straightforward profundity and cultural analysis of Cornel West's books, *Race Matters* and *Democracy Matters*. The idea of looking straight down into the heart of what we value and what things complicate our values—and at the end of the day, counting what matters—is a starting point looking for a way to say that music really matters.

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There are cultural and artistic matters all around these questions, but that music is still a profound force within all kinds of people's lives for the same reason and for many different reasons all at once is really fascinating. Black music has had such a distinctive flowering that an in-depth discussion of perhaps why it means so much to so many seems appropriate. At a certain point in my own career, I became possessed by this calling to explore the meanings in music culture, the lives of music makers, and a look deeper into the activity that shapes and accompanies people's lives in culture.

The Negro is a natural musician. He will learn to play on an instrument more quickly than a white man. . . . They may not know one note from the other, yet their ears catch the strains of any floating air, and they repeat it by imitation. . . . Inferior to the white race in reason and intellect, they have more imagination, more lively feelings and a more expressive manner. . . . With their imagination they clothe in rude poetry the incidents of their lowly life, and set them to simple melodies. . . . Blessed power of music! . . . It is a beautiful gift of God to this oppressed race to lighten their sorrows in the house of their bondage.

—"Songs of the Black," *Dwight's Journal of Music*,
November 15, 1856

The Negro writer who seeks to function within his race as a purposeful agent has a serious responsibility. . . . He is being called upon to do no less than create values by which his race is to struggle, live and die . . . create the myths and symbols that inspire a faith in life. . . . It means that in the lives of the Negro writers must be found those materials and experiences which will create a meaningful picture of the world today. . . . Surely this is the moment to ask questions, to theorize, to speculate, to wonder out of what materials can a human world be built.

—Richard Wright, 1937

Eighty-one years after that Dwight's "cultural" journal from 1856, author Richard Wright and others from the earlier Harlem Renaissance period of the 1920s were in a battle to debunk the horrific canon of White prejudices and hate. Black music, literature, and culture were called upon to straighten, enlighten, and move the people beyond the dark clouds of the past to forge ahead.

This is a cultural study, a study examining the ways music connects with people so deeply and profoundly. Somewhere here, social-culture studies and Black music culture studies merge. Music in these discussions is going public, taking what might be thought of as just a “classroom journey and search” and keeping a connection between the town and the gown, the tower and the corner.

Over the more than 20 years of calling on this great friend, Cornel West, he helped me construct and then launch Black Music Studies (Africana Studies) at Berklee College of Music. He gave me coaching on its structures, its meanings, its dynamics, its purpose in the academy, and then he came to Boston in 2005 to help us launch it and help put our troops in order for the wars ahead. Now that’s some love.

Over the years, we had spoken of a possible book; we called it *Black Music Matters*, and these were to be the opening chapters. We got busy, but it ain’t over yet—the book may still come along. Here are the opening arguments. As well, there are two sections—A Brief Historical Overview of the Schools of Thought, and Merging Black Culture and Black History Studies—and it is difficult to remember when and how they grew out of this, but these two turned up in *Cultural Codes*, two books ago. Here they return in original sequence with the West/Banfield material.

Thank you, Big Brother West.

You have to live with my tunes. When I sing a song it’s got to mean something to me, something I’ve had to live. Otherwise I can’t sing.

—Billie Holiday

Black music can be seen as a function and, to some extent, a cause of a peculiarly black ontology. . . . Thus, the investigation of black music is also the investigation of the black mind, the black social orientation, and primarily, the black culture (xxii). . . . The first black solo musician on the scene was the blues singer. . . . These musicians composed their own songs, based, for the first time, on the secular problems of the black individual (25). . . . The musician *is* the document. He is the information itself. The *impact* of stored information is transmitted not through records or archives, but through the human response of life. And that response is ongoing, in the air, everywhere, an alternative constantly available to those who have ears to hear (xi).

—Ben Sidran, *Black Talk*

(Black) Music Matters

Prelude

Black music is a great human mechanism of meanings. It can be viewed as a way to tell a whole lot of things about the world we live in, the way people lived, what they believe in, what captivated the imagination, the heroes, the values. We see in this music one's own self too, because it's a cultural form, so we see in it the history of our ancestors. It is a form of history that allows us to see American history, national insights, and aspirations. It gives us a sense of an international view because many people came to it and became "made into" from many places, and it spread out and affected people all over the world.

It is true that music allows you to "make yourself a world." We see our heroes in this music and our heroes' heroes. You can see the evolution and flowering of a great art tradition, the spiritual-blues continuum, as West has called it. One can see philosophies spun out and lived, like "Oh Freedom, before I'll be slave, I'll be buried in my grave and go home to my Lord and be free"; "Why am I so Black and blue?"; "It don't mean a thing, if it ain't got that swing"; "Say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud"; "What's going on?"; and "I'm not the average girl from your video, and I ain't built like a supermodel, but I learned to love my self unconditionally because I am a queen. My worth is not determined by the price of my clothes, no matter what, I'm India.Aire."

Through this music, you get to see how every generation has come to see itself mature, from the jazz age, Harlem Renaissance, swing, bebop, and rock and roll to hip-hop. You get to see the development of technology as an aid to modern living, the different expressions from phonographs, radio, and TV to MTV. And you get to see cultural images blossom and change through visual, fashion, style, from watermelon-eating depictions to Duke and Lady Day to Miles Davis to Beyoncé. We could go on and on, but there is such a range of personalities, social relationships, meanings, and developments—a complex of things we witness when viewing this music. The organizing principle for all this is culture, a living sustaining system of meanings, values, and expressions created to be lived through by groups of people. But Black American culture is a complex (multidimensional, classed), complicated (American social-racism), contorted (strained self-made imagery, language), compromised (remaking one's peoplehood,

over and over), convoluted (making of identities in ad hoc moments), constrained (by lack of power, finance), connected (cultural practices, church), committed (preserving identity), and compelling (humanness at its best) consciousness.

This consciousness has been maintained in a variety of expressions and creations, systems of meanings and values, created to be lived through by groups of people. The education premise is that if you teach creative Black music, you teach the American dream. All benefit. Black music emboldened the machinery of the human pursuit of the American spirit-dream: freedom, invention, innovation, freedom of expression, agents of change, community for the betterment of society, democracy for all, economic empowerment through fair share of work, and the realization of your dreams.

It just so happens that Black people were brought here at the bottom and at the beginning of an economic experiment called slavery, seen to its fullest manifestation in America and in the West. And by exercising their voices, talents, and creativity through protest, expressed through powerful, spiritually rich African musical traditions they transported to the West, they were able to not only realize dreams but also transform a society—and by doing so became the quintessential American example.

They never stopped imagining, seeing the dream from the bottom view. So the conquest and the winning meant more, and that's why the music sounds and feels so powerful. That's why Black music matters so much.

Culture as a study is the examination of how people through history created worldviews, ways of seeing the world and establishing patterns of lived normalcy, neutralizing oppressive powers, and creating shared cultural values. We believe, universally, seen across time, music is the great example. One specific, very rich, full-bodied example of all this is the Black American music tradition.

Musicians playing Black music often have referred to the work as carrying, representing, or being “the people’s voice,” and this is a very different kind of commitment to doing music.

Black cultural identity and expression have led folks into constructing “universals” in the human condition that are important and applicable to all people. Music matters here in a profoundly different way. This is what Black artistry brings to the table; the art was, is, by, and through expressions

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through which life was being lived, imagined, carved out, and represented. The stakes are high and the spirit of that meaning is palpable.

When you hear music, it's the spirit of the expression that matters. It's that spirit of the expression that cuts to your bone. When the volume is turned down, the lights are taken off it, when you can't see it but you feel it deep down in your soul, that's when music matters.

The entry point into this sharing about Black music culture is as an interpreter, a reader of cultural movements, of sayings about implications, of what these things suggest about the way people live with and through music, and most importantly, about the lessons that are there for our paths ahead. History is the springboard jolting us forward into time, and it forms a canvas upon which to paint, to envision new cadences, turn-arounds, and tempi. This is what artists do who think about making art and living. Music matters always, never ceasing to be an integral part of people's living patterns.

Prince's line from *Musicology* (2004) sticks out in my mind: "Don't you miss the feeling music gave ya back in the day?" We do.

In *Black Notes: Essays of a Musician Writing in a Post-Album Age*, I argued things had changed drastically and that we now live in a post-album age. I blamed MTV, BET, and a popular music recording-distribution-marketing-radio-TV-entertainment industry in demise, denial, and destruction of core values. These values, I argued, used to guide creative music processes and placed a premium on creativity, individuality, and invention. The focus in this chapter, however, is toward discussions about how artists continue to make music that matters and still believe in those "old school" core values.

The music from Black people in particular not only inspires but also is recognized worldwide as one of the great art flowerings in human culture. The music affected social movements and altered the course of, first, American culture, but then was also the spark plug for humanistic social protests from slave songs, blues, jazz, and hip-hop for social-cultural, economic, and political equality throughout the world.

What we might call the blues mode and rhythm affected modern music conception so completely, it must be the single most influential music since the beginning of modern notions of harmony and rhythm combining. In Black music culture studies, it has become increasingly important to show not only what impact the music had on the world but also how the music made a difference in the lives of the people the music

came from. What's distinctive and remarkable about Black music culture is that it made possible life and sustained living. From a musician's angle, the idea that this music is doing something that carries or represents "my people's voice" is a very different kind of commitment and connection with the music. The music has been a way by and through which life could be lived, imagined, carved out, and represented. Ellington stated, "I am trying to play the natural feelings of a people."

This music said for the singer, the performer, "I'm alive, I'm important, I'm human, you may not know this, but I'm more swift than you think and I have the right to be free, and my expression matters to me for that reason." Now *that* is music that matters, and there are tremendous lessons to be gained from exploring music that matters like this music has mattered. For these reasons, Black music culture and traditions are influential to modern thought and culture, and its full study provides an invaluable window into our human history.

Everywhere people are moving more toward cultural talk and the context folks live in, from academic circles to MTV. While much, and most, of popular culture comes from a controlled media apparatus, it is many times the place from which regular people's narratives have come. Behind this idea of what matters comes a poet's inventory of ideas about meaning: significance, symbolization, representation, consequence, passion, dedication, pursuit of freedom, celebration of ideas, engaging creativity, commitment, honor, seduction, professional calling, sustaining one's life, and moving someone.

Challenges of Casting Cultural Codes and the Deconstruction of a Market Mind-set

Cultural codes are inscriptions of meanings conceived, created, and constructed, and then projected and performed, which suggests that certain ways of being, thinking, looking, and styling are normative, preferable, and validated. They are reflective of ideas, and they project powerful images and mental pictures that are sustaining, impressionable. Cultural codes are great, but they can be permanently damaging too. They can be problematic because these codes set patterns of particular paradigms for how people think, behave, and then define their roles, their rationale, their worldviews, and their value systems.

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Who controls the dissemination of a music product is always an important debate. I believe it's interconnected. Second to taking care of your health and the ones we love, there are few more critical and determinative actions definitive to our living than how one's ideas are shaped relative to how we want to see ourselves living in the world. Those information blocks, the cultural codes—and they are many and complex, yes—but they are consciously constructed. So constructing cultural codes becomes a work that much is invested in from a value, an internal spiritual conception, but it is also a market commodity construction. The deconstruction and evaluation as a work is essential to marking how a society and individuals in a society operate, or in forecasting where our world is heading in terms of people directions.

Black Music Matters

We have to peer back into the spirituals and listen to those nonliterate peasant folks who had to struggle against laws that didn't allow them to read or write, listen to that art! . . . We want to remind the younger generation that they were not singing for some search for a cheap American dream. They were not looking for some narrow conception of success. No, they were looking for a greatness and a magnanimity and an integrity of self-respect, self-regard that allowed them to love themselves but to do it in such a way that did not require putting others down. Spiritual maturity, moral wisdom, connecting all folks on the human scale.

—Dr. Cornel West

We want to talk about the richest tradition in the history of modernity: musical traditions from people of African descent who, out of their doings and sufferings, were able to transcend and transfigure their moans and groans into an art form that all of us now must focus on. Black music matters.

In 1973, Bernice Johnson Reagon had the courage to bring together those voices that actually connected political engagement and social reflection with music, music, music. I want to disabuse you of the notion that music is simply a form of stimulation and titillation. It's not about superficial entertainment. It's a way of life, a mode of existence in the world, and a form ennobling a people, and being open to all people as it does that. In the wonderful text from 1924 written by W.E.B. Du Bois called *The Gift of Black Folk*, written 21 years after the classic 1903 text *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du

Bois recognized that you couldn't talk about what it meant to be human, or talk about the meaning of love or romance, let alone keeping a life fragile, precarious, or keeping the precious experiments of democracy alive, without talking about the gift of Black folks. And anytime you talk about the gifts of Black folk, you must begin with the music.

This gift is the same ocean of great musical streams of Black tradition where raising your voice and having the courage to speak from the depths of your soul touches other souls to keep them moving as they try and make their way in the darkness. Soul music. And what is soul music? It's the sharing of the sweet smoothness against the backdrop, against the harshness. It is the sweet and sad against misery, so that the present indictment can be negated artistically by new possibilities, transforming your social misery into musical delicacies.

James Brown, the funkmeister, taught us there is sublime beauty in the funk. He taught us there is a danger and a contagious freedom in the funk if you get down in it deep enough. You can find love in the funk if you have the courage to deal with the stench and the foulness of it. James Brown came out of a tradition of people who had been on intimate terms with forms of death. The social death of slavery, 244 years, human beings transformed into simply things to be bought and sold, having the same status as a piece of property or an ox. And what was the response of Black folks to the social death of slavery? They held hands in a circle and said, "Yes, we are ordinary people, like James Cleveland said. Yes, we are everyday people like Sly Stone said. But you know what? We still have power. You might check the channels when it comes to politics. You might block various roads when it comes to economic development. But the power we have at this moment is the power of our voices."

And we watched these voices harmonize in such a way that empowered each other over and against the darkness of slavery. Now, over 400 years later, we can look at this as the first true American musical art form created in the precious yet flawed democracy called the United States. We have to reach back into the spirituals and listen to those nonliterate folks who had to struggle against laws that didn't allow them to read or write, laws that didn't allow them to bury their dead. But listen to the spirituals; listen to those artistic products emerging out of that unbroken circle of singers, holding hands for dear life. They were wondering where one's baby was, where one's love ones were, listen to that art!

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And we want to remind the younger generation that they were not singing for some search for a cheap American dream. They said, “Let freedom ring”; they were singing about freedom—they didn’t say, “Give me the bling, bling.”

They were not looking for some narrow conception of success. They weren’t obsessed with just financial prosperity of living large in some vanilla suburb. No, they were looking for a greatness, a magnanimity, and an integrity of self-respect and self-regard that allowed them to love themselves but to do it in such a way that did not require putting others down. That’s spiritual maturity, moral wisdom, connecting all folks on the human scale. Anytime you talk about the Black music tradition, be it Louis Armstrong, Sarah Vaughan, John Coltrane, or Alice Coltrane, we mean beyond superficial classification. Black music asks us: What kind of human do you want to be? What kind of legacy do you want to live? What is the quality of service you give to others? Do you find joy in giving service to others? The Black musical tradition at its best is about raising those kinds of terrifying questions, frightening questions, that most Americans are afraid to deal with.

Because today the market forces are coming at us so fast, we seem to be obsessed with getting over by any means necessary, so drawn by pecuniary gains, instant gratification, and fleeting pleasures. Who wants to raise the fundamental question that Louis Armstrong raised: Why am I so Black and blue? What is it about these people, this culture, whose civilization seems to be so death dodging, death ducking, death denying that they can’t come to terms with their own social, civic death messing with “me”? Denial, evasion, avoidance! America has a Constitution that talks about “We the people,” yet at the time, 22 percent of its inhabitants in 13 colonies were in slavery—the African Americans. But there is in the document no reference to the institution of slavery. That’s called denial, hypocrisy, and mendacity. We ended up fighting a war over an institution of slavery that was not even evoked in our Constitution.

We ended up with a 13th Amendment to that same Constitution referring to a set of principles that were overlooked, ignored, and denied in the original. This was a proslavery document!

If it were not for the spirit of Black music, reflected in those precious Black bodies, enslaved, and their determination to be free, this is what transformed that proslavery document into an antislavery document. That’s what the 13th Amendment was, and that’s what the struggle of

Black folks and progressive White brothers and sisters was. They had to cut against the White supremacist grain in their own families, neighborhoods, and communities.

The Black music tradition has to do with Black folks straightening up their backs, and once you straighten up your back, nobody can ride it. They only ride your back when it's bent. Straighten up! Sly Stone said, "Stand."

Stand with grace, dignity, take action with courage and compassion with malice toward none, shot through with love, and shot through with a righteous indignation against injustice and unfairness. This has to do with the empowerment of everyday people so we can, as the Negro anthem says, "Lift every voice and sing, 'till earth and heaven ring. Ring with the harmonies of liberty." Lift your voice. And what happens when you lift your voice in institutions that guide and regulate your life? You have a democracy that works.

The Black music tradition in many ways is the grand species of democratic symbolic action of finding your voice, having the courage to discover who you really are when you take off the mask, and lift that voice in such a way. In this way, you hear the humanity in other voices, and you engage in active, generous, genuine listening of the other voices. And as these voices fuse, it elevates the collective performance of whatever you are doing. Have I just described the John Coltrane quartet?

Have I just described Ellington's band? Black musicians have said, "All we have is our own voices, and we are not afraid. We are going to be involved in bold, frank, honest, fearless, and uninhibited speech." And these were great musicians, not the mediocre ones who strive to become well adjusted to and within an unjust culture industry.

We are talking about the great Black music that allowed one to be true to the depth of the voice of the soul. "I have got to get it out!"

Isn't that what Marvin Gaye told Berry Gordy? Berry said, "We don't do concept albums, Marvin." Marvin answered, "I got to get this out, Berry. I've got something to say and I can't have any interruptions in the album, this has got to flow." "But radio won't play it," said Berry Gordy.

"I'm sorry. I've got to get this out, Berry."

And in the spring of 1971, Marvin got it out. What's going on, what about the babies, what about the children, mercy, mercy, holy, holy holy?! Marvin got it out. And another genius in 1976, 25-year-old Stevie Wonder, said there are "Songs in the key of life' and 'Love's in need of love

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today.” You have got to get it out, and these great musicians did it by finding their voices and still connecting to this grand struggle of what it means to be human, through this great Black music tradition. They asked what it means to be human, profoundly political, from the human to the political, meaning existential. What does it mean to exist in the world as a human being?

And that’s why Black music is always at its best, cutting against the grain, allowing you to be true to yourself, your voice. If you take it upon yourself to have the audacity to be a musician in the Black music tradition, get your courage together. This tradition had high standards set in the history of the modern world.

You are going to have to cut against the grain, because if you tell the truth about who you are, it will pit you against White supremacy, male supremacy, against obscene wealth, imperialist arrogance and hubris, and inequality—all which may be fine for the streamlined, mainlined, rewarded person. But this is a bodaciousness that you have to have. Black music saves lives, keeping us from going crazy. It is not just keeping us in comfort and constitution; it has to do with keeping track of the best we have in us, because when we lose contact with it, we lose contact with our humanity. The music allowed Black folks at our best to move beyond our humanistic, narcissistic furry, frenzy, egocentric predicament.

The music allowed us to be bigger, to be true to the music, connecting us all to be bigger than ourselves. This “being bigger” is being compassionate, justice seeking, and freedom finding, taking a risk and paying a price, being willing to sacrifice for young people who are 100 percent our future. That’s why Black music matters.

—Dr. Cornel West, speech delivered at the opening of the
Africana Studies Program, Berklee College of Music,
February 1, 2007, Boston, Massachusetts

Culture, Fuses, and Peculiar Environments That Matter

Musician and cultural theorist George Lewis wrote,

For the bebop musicians, this upheaval had a great deal to do with the assertion of self-determination with regard to their role as musical artists. . . . [It] created new possibilities for the construction of an African-

American improvisative musicality that could define itself as explicitly experimental. . . . viewed as a direct challenge . . . to the entire social order as it applied to Blacks in the 1940s apartheid America.

One should not forget America in this journey, a “peculiar environment.” Thomas Jefferson, called the Apostle of Americanism, wrote in his book in 1781,

In music they [the Blacks] are more generally gifted than the whites with accurate ears for tune and time, and they have been found capable of imagining a small catch. Whether they will be equal to the composition of a more extensive run of melody, or of complicated harmony, is yet to be proved.

Keep in mind, while Jefferson was penning those words, a Black composer/conductor, Chevalier de St. George, was at that time the musical director of the leading concert orchestra in Paris. He composed 11 violin concerti. And in slave-holding USA, less than 150 years later came the Afro American Symphony in 1930 by Black American symphonic composer William Grant Still based on blues and spirituals. Fifteen more years or so, bebop, then free jazz, funk, and hip-hop had developed and we knew this music and its creators were capable of all sorts of things.

This gives a very interesting insight into how the music has been reported by others in this “peculiar environment” of American cultural history. How the people are valued, looked at, and how the artistic and humanistic expressions are valued or not—that matters. Viewed in this light, there is a functioning brew out of which the greatest collection of influential music has come—a unique cultural context. Now when you hear the blues, you know the artists have penned their narratives, have crafted their tunes, and have reported their living, and you know why the music mattered.

Many of these questions that have shaped the Black quest for understanding within Black history have been well documented, but people just don't know about it. The study of history has existed primarily in academic circles, attempting to link and analyze sociocultural phenomena. These considerations are an important part of the development of these questions that matter. This is culture study. There are three groups that this discussion ultimately weaves through: first, the music makers; second,

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what matters to people in the academic circles tracing and teaching Black music; and third, what matters to folks on the street who love, listen to, and purchase music. This discussion tries to be in touch with these three impulses.

Culture is the basis of all ideas, images and actions. To move is to move culturally, i.e. by a set of ideas given to you by your culture.

—Maulana Karenga

To connect what matters among these groups, we need to connect the dots to Black history studies, Black music studies, Black musicians, and Black folk. There are several schools of thought that have emerged in traditional Black studies over the years. Reviewing the history of Black studies in its development, and seeing the emergence of schools of thought that attempt to address those hurdles, is a dynamic development. Black culture study wrestles with shifting values and several generations of thinkers who bring new paradigms to the study of Black people as an academic discipline that has been growing well over one hundred years.

These are the central problems and tasks of the Black studies discipline as it has developed since W.E.B. Du Bois's classic paper published in January 1898, in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, "The Study of the Negro Problems." Since that classic study, Black studies as an academic discourse has grown into a multidirectional full-scale study of Black people and their impact on the development of human history in modern times.

There have arisen hurdles, forks in the road, and many questions as to the direction of what were the first traditional Black studies and now what might be called Africana studies. The central markers of thought have been:

1. Beginning as an academic discipline, establishing an identity and a purposeful discourse to adequately contribute to the full study of Black people and their history.
2. The task of rewriting a soiled human narrative largely focused on European-centered history and cultural development.

3. Creating a model, a paradigm, for an intellectual, philosophical clarity that brings unification within the discipline that is seen as viable and academically credible.
4. Creating a balance between intellectual academic rigor, purpose, and relevant connections that reach and affect everyday Black people.
5. Establishing a respectful balance of focus among interdisciplinary camps and integrating a humanities study of social history, sciences, and the disciplines of music, theater, dance, and literature.
6. Working from a usable and flexible set of themes that can also be unifying in the study focus, such as race, identity, power/politics, gender, image representation, cultural creation, and commoditization. And above all, that at the end of the day, the students make the responsible and real connection with their studies and a commitment to working for the betterment of society.

There are generally six major movements or waves of thinking about Black existence that have responded to the peculiar American environment. These have all come largely from within academic circles and literary and cultural developments, but can in some ways be grouped accordingly.

1. Du Boisian social academic studies model (University of Pennsylvania, 1898 study)
2. Carter G. Woodson corrective history model (The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1916)
3. Harlem Renaissance arts movement 1920s–1929 (Hughes, Hurston, Bontemps, Still, Savage). Although not solely an academic response, the tenets of its movement impacted education in providing an impetus for scholarly inquiry as seen in Alaine Locke and others who called for a literary/cultural academic movement representative of great strides in the cultural arts.

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4. A 1950s–1960s postwar, civil rights movement, a second national rise in Black progress and consciousness among the folks (Jackie Robinson, Althea Gibson, Ralph Ellison, Gwendolyn Brooks, New York Negro Ballet).
5. Nationalists, Black Arts (Black Power), Black studies, the “Black experience” or the ’70s essentialists/culturalists models (Amiri Baraka, Harold Cruse, Maulana Karenga, Molefi Kete Asante, Afrocentricity)
6. Postmodern, interdisciplinary, globalists of the ’90s, the new elites (Henry Louis Gates Jr., Cornel West, bell hooks, Eric Michael Dyson) or what Manning Marable calls “the radical, democratic multiculturalists.”

Most are unaware that these people, movements, and questions have turned ideas over and over and that there exist many different platforms and positions upon which debating teams have stood. The questions of what has mattered, related to Black life and the pursuit of those ideals, is far more complex than the classic bifurcation of, let’s say, a Du Bois vs. Booker T. or a Malcolm X vs. King. You have to factor in class, education, economics, and integration, and as Black people have become more integrated, they have more freedoms to, at leisure, choose their paths, which are more plentiful, longer, and fruitful.

This inevitably—for good or bad—creates a diversified palette. Add to this modern culture, technology, how popular culture tastes, how the media project value sensibilities, and how market forces impact us. Out of this, there is a complex of stuff that affects thinking and adds to the threads of unity that constitute ideologies, aesthetics, and cultural patterns.

Within all these movements, the centrality of African culture and origins has been a constant thread. All of these movements somehow look to Africa as a strong cultural mother ground and referent. So the global questions of how Black people came and come out of Africa and then immerse and affect the larger world lie at the base of these questions and many points of reckoning.

Within these global questions rises the economic and human exploitation that brings us here. Europe and America’s wealth and power was largely determined by its accumulation of capital, having 400+

years of slave labor. In this economic relationship, as Du Bois points out, Africa is the major silent business and cultural partner. Western scholars, as prophetic African thinker Walter Rodney pointed out, “only made marginal reference to the massive exploitation of Africans, Asians, and American Indians . . . to accomplish their great western prize of civilization.”

People of color have literally paid the costs for White society to be in place as they are now. Cultural studies must always keep a tough eye on this point and illuminate this dark hidden secret. So while culture and arts is our primary concern, economic, politics, social construction, and intellectual enterprises are in this mix.

A question in all of this might be asked: Who is it that should/will benefit from all this passionate research and teaching of Black thought? Is it solely an academic question and paradigm or is there, as some have suggested, also a way to merge academic discourse within community/church, social/political communities to somehow have a more multi-tiered dialogue that reaches several places where people “live”?

From an essay titled “Black Studies, Multiculturalism and the Future of American Education” (*A Turbulent Voyage: Readings in African American Studies*, 1997), Manning Marable argues for the criteria for educational excellence in multicultural vision and definition in a curriculum that rightfully respects and reflects the cultural diversity that makes up the society we live in and into which students are being prepared to contribute. He writes,

The serious study of the African-American experience is important not just to black students, . . . all students, regardless of their ethnic background or heritage, can become intellectually enriched by explorations into the African-American experience. Included among the general requirements . . . the development of issues which impact blacks and other people of color not only inside the U.S. but across the globe. We must cultivate an internationalist perspective on education, recognizing that the solutions to the problems of learning in rapidly changing societies are not confined to any single country or culture.

He goes on to argue for the necessary connections between academic excellence and social responsibility and not merely to interpret but to change the world.

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In this regard, the common themes or threads in Black life resonate throughout the diaspora, globally connecting Black experiences.

For example, in Langston Hughes's great manifesto, he declared, "We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame." Well, the entire French-poetry-speaking Black world was lifted and an African American hero energized the group known as the Negritude poets. The same connection can be seen today as Blacks in Brazil and Europe, as well as in Africa and the Islands, rally around hip-hop as the aesthetic/stylistic voice of their generation.

This cross-global transcultural dialogue is crucial to the understanding of Africana studies, the connections between Black ideas in the academy, and among musicians and the folks. I was especially moved by film director Spike Lee's comment regarding the research he had done for his film *Bamboozled* that chronicles—and treats as a parody and satire—Black-face minstrelsy. Lee said, "When I did my research for the film, what hurt me was the depth to which White America showed its hatred of Black people, via radio, film, television, songs, . . . it's amazing. I hoped my film would initiate dialogue and a deeper probing look at history to allow us to confront what we are doing today and what we are going to do."

Speaking as an educator, the goal of education is to train, equip, and enlighten; this affects craft and contribution, and it guarantees that the music a musician makes matters, because it comes out of a grounded and informed historical-cultural training and foundation.

Merging Black Culture and Black Music Studies

Classic Black studies begin with W.E.B. Du Bois's case study of Negro life delivered at the University of Pennsylvania in 1898. He argues that the study of the Negro was a field rich with possibilities that even Europe envied. The social phenomena arising from the presence of 8 million Negroes were a rich study "and a mass of truth worth knowing." Because of the "central and all-absorbing need" of America to sustain and develop wealth, there grew problems resulting in the rise of an unprecedented social and cultural society.

But what grew out of this was not so much a society with a color or race problem but a class problem needing to define society based on the division of labor and who benefits from those labors. The Negro people developed unprecedented cultural responses to the peculiar environment of America. In this early paper, Du Bois suggested there were four windows through which to appropriately study this: historical, statistical, anthropological, and sociological. He concluded by assigning two agencies to oversee this important discussion: the government and the university. After some time teaching in the South and living among the folks, Du Bois would go on to publish *The Souls of Black Folks*, where we would more empathically champion Black culture in many of its expressions. In Du Bois's great testament, he declared that "America could not raise up to the noble notion of democracy" until Blacks were allowed the social right to democracy, and therefore their song of spiritual striving, sorrow songs were the "richest example of profound human testimony" of marked significance "more profound than anything that humanity had yet accomplished. . . . Would America even be America without its Negro people?"

What is amazing is that although that question was not properly answered in direct political, sociological, written documents, it was answered in aesthetic, cultural terms, because the very Negro people who were burdened socially with this peculiar environment transformed their striving largely by their artistic human response. While there was equal intellectual progression, even social at many levels, what got the "hearing" was the artistic, cultural expression.

Equally powerful is that there was an unprecedented switch: It was the laborers, the slave culture, that became the most celebrated, humanly identifiable expression that marked America. That ranking of greatness by Western standards originated with the Black folks' aesthetic creations. For us, that musical note is of great interest.

Many years had passed in America after the emancipation of slaves, and although America had benefited greatly from the artistic creations of Black folks, the social condition had not much changed. The laws that patterned this unique American social formula of the old slave society were still in place, largely recognized as segregation one hundred years after the Civil War of the mid-1800s. The civil rights revolution of the '50s

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and '60s would turn its attention to Du Bois's two mechanisms for social regeneration in America: the government and the university.

The '60s ushered into play Black studies, which sought to properly examine and reposition the focus on the extraordinary history and contributions of Black people and their social cultural contribution to modern civilization from African past to present.

Moving from Du Bois's early four-tier examination, Black scholars would further argue from many positions, a multitude of lenses and takes on these that produce a multi-tiered perspective on Black studies, one we are still sorting through.

Factor into this the explosion of British cultural studies as well as power, race, identity, image, and gender studies, and now was brought forth a full Du Boisian statistical sociological human worth study of the various peoples and their peculiar environment, as he stated, "a mass of truth worth knowing."

Black music studies follow as well these developmental and connecting trends, social significance, and connections to traditional West African practices, and are reflective of what academics pose as the pressing issues shaping academic discourse.

As Eileen Southern asserted in the bible of Black music studies, *The Music of Black Americans*, the Black musician has created an entirely new music in a style peculiarly Afro-American that spreads its influence all over the world. This particular music, in this American peculiar environment, suggests a different view and recognition that Black music is unique, and this difference is what shapes the academic line of inquiry. When we view Black music, it—like the social questions—globally reflects musical development throughout the Black world. Hip-hop was actually mobilized by a Jamaican DJ who settled in the Bronx in the early 1970s, but one who played R&B records in his hometown. Hip-hop music revolutionized American popular music culture, then went out again to move Black thought, expression, and style around the ideals of mobilizing youth, identity, and social protests around the world. Popular culture becomes a significant model to study how people become connected in society.

Southern Black music college programs led the way in focusing on usable models of Black music culture from the spiritual, church music practices, then rag and jazz band, as well as march practices very early on (Fisk, Hampton, Tuskegee), even before established schools introduced

jazz or popular culture studies into mainstream curriculum. From James M. Trotter's classic beginning of Black music study, *Music and Some Highly Musical People* ("A Description of Music, a Glance at the History of Music, and the Power, Beauty and Uses of Music and Remarkable Musicians of the Colored Race"), published in Boston in 1881, we can see the case for an equally important development of Black music studies. Even though these musicians were largely "classical" artists, the embodiment of Black culture ideas on page as a study is significant. Music printing of race, coon songs, the minstrel tradition, and ragtime publications commenced, and as musicologist Guthrie Ramsey points out, "Jazz criticism played a crucial role in elevating international perceptions about the value of indigenous American music-making. . . . [D]uring the 1920s and slightly before, writers of various stripes—composers, journalists, music critics, musicians—published books and articles about jazz in many magazines." Of note during this period is pianist/historian/arranger Maud Cuney Hare. A classically trained pianist and graduate of the New England Conservatory, she wrote *Negro Musicians and Their Music* (1936). Of interest for us, she was engaged to W.E.B Du Bois and spent some time as editor of *Crisis* magazine.

All three—Du Bois, Trotter, and Cuney Hare—were affiliated and community connected in Boston. It is here that some of the crossroads of musical scholarship, Black music scholarship, and the connections with the Black community intersect, creating the necessary bridges for connections around matters of music and culture and the folk. I am interested in creating further dialogues within these crossroads today.

While jazz band chart arranging courses emerged very early on after the emergence of jazz practice, jazz schools in the 1950s emerged, such as the founding of the Berklee School of Music, but Black popular music outside of the training of spirituals and jazz was nonexistent.

It was largely the Black Power movement in the '60s that voiced concerns about a lack of Black cultural content in the college or university setting, and this was raised about music forms as well. Courses looking at the blues, R&B, and soul emerged in curriculums at universities in the late '60s and '70s. As musicology, ethnomusicology, and the academic study of music raised the bar and values of music studies, many classic debates arose that have remained center stage among music teachers and aestheticians about Black music as a study. The big questions was: What

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is Black music? It was settled in several early articles and books—such as our classic *Blues People* by Amiri Baraka (1967), Addison Gayle's *The Black Aesthetic* (1968), *Black Music in Our Culture* by Dominique-René de Lerma (1969), Eileen Southern's *The Music of Black Americans* (1970), Ben Sidran's *Black Talk* (1971), and *The Black Composer Speaks* by David and Lida Baker and Herman Hudson (1978)—that Black music is music made by Black people connecting with their cultural conditions in and outside Africa in diaspora.

An important argument that scholars began to boldly make was the unthinkable, unbearable separation of Black music, Black life, Black thought, Black sound, Black participation, Black culture—a distinction made by both Black and non-Black scholars. As Sidran pointed out, “Black music can be seen as a function and, to some extent, a cause of a peculiarly black ontology. . . . Thus, the investigation of black music is also the investigation of the black mind, the black social orientation, and, primarily, the black culture.” This is why in teaching and talking about Black music culture, you can't separate Black music function, meaning its connection to Black life. It's unthinkable to discuss or teach any form of music apart from the people's culture.

In the landmark writing culminating around a meeting among scholars, composers, and educators at Indiana University in 1969, the book *Black Music in Our Culture* focused on Black music, the audience, the role of the composer in addressing the Black situation, college pedagogy, curriculum, history, Black composers' allegiance to the avant-garde, jazz and pop, the relationship to Black traditional religion, the Black church and education, and the lack of information about Black composers.

By the time these larger discussions opened up in scholarly circles in education and in the streets (as evidenced by the soul movement's reliance on traditional African notions of beauty, community, solidarity, etc.), Black music was understood as popular, sacred, secular, European based, experimental avant-garde, protest, vernacular, music from Cuba, Brazil, Jamaica, and Haiti, and elsewhere in South America, and wherever Black people landed and felt the need to express and respond to their condition and celebrate their living through the culture of musical expressions. In this incubator, a great and powerful tradition has sprung and its “copyation,” exploitation, and commodification has spurred debates about how the music is actually used in market culture, and what effect this has upon folks.

Three Important Classic Music Culture Questions

Whose culture is it? “Mama and them.” In the custody battles over the very loved child of Black music, the questions are contentious and debated: Who can claim family ownership of the child, Black music, and why is it important? Music study is not primarily a study of history but is a cultural study. I refer to a saying in the Black community, “Mama and them.” Folks would always say, “Mama and them” referring to folks in the family, usually older folks and usually pertaining to something the family did, cherished, relished, and had ownership with. Extracting the meaning and use of this, when somebody says, “Mama and them,” the direct correlation is that that is culturally identified as “us,” “we,” “our experience,” which in the discussion of cultural and historical tradition is like part of the contract for living.

If one can refer to what Mama and them did, then that’s your culture. If your “Mama and them” sang spirituals, hummed the blues during cooking, danced the old jig when they heard a familiar tune, swayed and held a finger up at the very mention of an old church hymn (as musicologists speak of embedded cultural memory, this gives ownership to one’s human narrative and it is impactful), that’s your folks’ culture.

So your cultural ownership could be determined by what Mama and them sang or did. If you are playing Gamelan music, but your Mama and them sang the old Irish songs, the Gamelan music should make you appreciate all the more the power of that tradition that made you be a part of somebody else’s Mama and them. To go to the source of your inspiration brings honor and meaning to your heightened, extended family membership. The reason we even need to consider the idea of ownership, rights, and honor is because of the history of disrespect, denial, appropriation without negotiation, and cultural “erasure” that has gone on in the American media cultural apparatus. Black imagery and culture has been so “dogged” that we have to say, “Stop that.” There is a general disrespect and disregard of Black life and its value. So we have to talk, speak, and document culture as a precious museum item, like something that matters most. It is not Ken Burns’s jazz, it belongs to somebody’s “Mama and them.” Every matriculating music student of American music tradition should have to attend a Black church, a traditional mass, and a traditional Protestant hymn-singing congregation, and ask to be allowed to attend

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an appropriate mosque or temple ritual. This way, the music student has sung what “Mama and them” sang.

Then you have educated your student. Of course, Mama and them could very well have sung any number of a variety of songs, and therein lies the “peculiar environment” and weird baking and shaking that resulted in this American cultural experiment. But this balanced back-and-forth swing and discussion of our culture is crucial in the discussion of origins and directions.

What role does race play in the development of Black music? Without racism and the practice of White superiority, popular music as we know it in most American forms would be completely different today. There would be no Negro spiritual, and it follows, then, that there would be no blues, no jazz, no R&B, no gospel, no rock and roll, no soul, no reggae, no funk, no disco, no hip-hop.

Perhaps everything would be an Irish-English folk jig with violins and tambourines. And critics of this cultural essentialism would be clueless in answering the question, “If you took Black expression and experience out of the American modern musical equation, what would you have left?” Black rejection and rebellion to race hatred, terrorism, and White superiority brought forth a soul-mental reaction that was musical, and all these styles of American music were thus formed. So to teach American music and not teach the historical, cultural, and social roots and the underlying causes—that the American practices of racism are deceitful and counterhistorical—would, if allowed, make the music sound flat. The flavor of the elements in their dish would be virtually nonexistent. The racial rub up against our skins is a primary ingredient and source (in some cases) of American music. A sensitive and informative discussion of the shaping factors of American social-racial history as a part of our cultural grounding is essential.

As stated earlier, all music we hear is music that is culturally constructed, coded in set meanings, methods of production, aesthetic values, imagery, and sound—all are man-made and marketed. There are few, if any, free-standing working philosophies even of pure unconditional music. Well, even free jazz, the “free-ist music in America,” is bound by aesthetic or practice values that make the listener bound to certain expectations of appreciation.

The problem with a concept of universal art without “race or face” is that it minimizes and devalues culture- and people-specific narratives.

Nothing is universal in this sense because it's always about my experience, in my time, or it's our town, in our time, done in our way, or sung in your key. Then I may "buy into" that and come along. People had to buy into "We shall overcome." If you play music to a group of people, ask everyone to describe or define what they saw, felt, their reactions. If you listen to or watch a performance; ask yourself, What's going on here? What is specific? What is universal? What is culturally coded? How does the music function? None of our reactions to that music are universal; they are all culturally conditioned responses.

Coda

What has emerged out of this are traditions of music, movements of music eras, great artistry, and a huge following of people of all sorts who have been moved by music making in the Black tradition. The "classroom journey" attempts to tie this into important questions of historical and cultural education. Somehow this is a necessary part of humanities development. When viewing great music movements, one sees that development of a great society in all its complexities. But societies are made up of communities of people. Most of us who make music and teach in a music school find ourselves locked in struggles between the two worlds of the beat on the street and the meaning of what matters in the mind; expressions of musical artists sometimes bridge these two worlds. What matters to musicians is crucial because their work reflects the impulse, tastes, desires, and worldviews of everyday folks in their communities. We must keep in mind that Du Bois's great call was that this music, this study, this life of Black folks in America and throughout the world, was of great importance to the full development of the human race.

The resultant musical expressions communicated sounds, feelings, and ideas that brought inspiration, happiness, and connection and solved the dilemma of broken identity.

That is a very powerful concept, because human personality is broken or made by the projection and perception of sustained and concrete identity. After you have studied this music, the artists, the evolution of modern culture, and having seen all this activity (granted, mostly in creative arts), there is no denying the critical impressions and importance this music and its creators' cultures have had on shaping modernity. The

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descriptions of innovation, invention, original voice, composer, idea, craft, lyricism, movement, control, finesse, style, refinement in thinking, and genius are afforded to the best, brightest thinking and accomplishments in any society. What happens when you attach those words as the definition of what Black people have accomplished through at least one form of human activity? Your definition of those people changes drastically. And this would not usually even be an issue, except when you consider the attack and affronts to Black dignity that have been issued from the society they have contributed to so greatly. One has to ask, “Have not these people been one of the greatest examples of leaders of the world . . . because their music is so eventful and inextricably bound with the rise of the best in human capacity?” As I ask often, “Why have not those accomplishments, models, and values been held up as a shining light to continue the elevation of our people and this great nation?” Who now controls the projections of images, ideas, and art? Why has a society now allowed its best voices to be subjected to a repackaging of ill effect?

Once you hear Louis Armstrong, listen to William Grant Still’s *Afro American Symphony* or Florence Price’s *Symphony in E*, Charlie Parker, Monk, Son House, or a gospel choir, or you compare Count Basie and Ellington’s music and motion, or compare Billie Holiday, Sarah Vaughan, Bessie Smith, Nat King Cole, Sam Cooke, and Luther to a Sinatra or Doris Day—you are changed, deep inside. They register differently because their greatness is connected to a soil tilled and fertilized by these people. These movements and unique, incarnate styles of art become apparent and indicate that this is something not like anything ever heard in music before. So you ask about the sources, you examine the people, and you see the work this has “done on the world” and on society, and you are moved by the enormous contribution this art flowering has. This has been a map of sorts to measure the directions Black music has taken. This is the huge impression that is left on my mind and soul when viewing this music fully and why Black music matters.

So in closing, and moving to what musicians say, we felt a heartfelt knowledge of our history is important because there are things that have mattered when musicians talk about Black music. How does it groove? How does it function? What is the message, and how does it link with the heritages of Black music practice? Now having considered some of

the questions and issues that have mattered in and around the fuller discussion of Black music culture, we can move to more specific questions posed to music makers and try to gain from their insights and reactions, engagement with their audiences, supporters, and within the industry and our culture today. (Black) music matters.

Coda Box

Culture is the manifestation of how people through history created worldviews—that is, their ways of seeing the world and establishing patterns of lived normalcy, neutralizing oppressive powers, and creating shared cultural values; music is universally seen across time as a great example.

Terms

Blues modality and rhythm:	Black styles of music.
Du Boisian social academic studies model:	W.E.B. Du Bois, talented tenth and the idea that racial progress could be obtained through parity in business, education, and the arts.
Carter G. Woodson corrective history model:	Black history and cultural studies.
Harlem Renaissance arts movement (1920–1935):	Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Arna Bontemps, William Grant Still, Augusta Savage—all young artists whose work impacted education, providing an impetus for scholarly inquiry, represented a cultural /academic movement of great strides in the cultural arts.
Black Nationalists, Black Arts (Black Power):	“Black experience” of the ’70s. Essentialists or culturists, Afrocentricity—all invested in the importance of Black culture, historically, economically, educationally, politically, socially, and culturally.

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Postmodern,
interdisciplinary,
globalists:

A later group of scholars who, during the 1990s, raised the level in cultural debates in popular culture about a “new way, a popular identity of being scholars” linked to contemporary issues after the 1970s, which included a progressive inclusive politic of multiculturalism, popular culture like hip-hop, interdisciplinary studies, people like Cornel West, Henry Louis Gates, Eric Michael Dyson, bell hooks.

“Mama and them”:

Your people’s cultural traditions.

CHAPTER FIVE
NOTES FROM CUBA
November 2012–February 2013

Meeting Cuban Artist Orestes Gaulhiac Rodríguez

This whole trip to Cuba started out with a painting by Orestes Gaulhiac Rodríguez. I was visiting Provincetown, off the Cape in Massachusetts with my wife, Krystal, during the summer of 2011. After an afternoon’s walk, she returned raving about a painting she had seen in a local gallery, Galería Cubana. I was excited to see it. Michelle Wojcik, the owner, a known collector and agent of Cuban painters, greeted us and took me over to the corner where this painting that captivated my wife resided. I was floored. The work, “Messing with Other People’s Heads,” was all the things I had known about Cuban art but never was close enough to witness for myself. I knew the music. I knew a bit about Cuba’s cultural history and mythology, our media hype, and I knew the rhetoric out of the embargo years, and I knew Bay of Pigs and Castro and all that. But I had never looked deeply into the visual artwork. I was struck immediately by a list of impressions I had from the work:

- Bold
- Pastiche, blended figures
- Relational, inextricably bound
- Energetic, the dance and ritual
- But searching, searing, “seeing”
- Color and patterned
- Introspection and reflective

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- Everything is, awake, alive, moving in thought and meaning
- Vibrancy
- Cuban, African
- Wearing the mask

All these spoke to me immediately in aesthetic terms and I heard music in my head. I felt motion in my feet and my artist heart stirred with all kinds of ideas and emotions. I had never purchased art from a gallery or dealer, but I had been a deep admirer, had taught art appreciation to youth, and had studied painting for years under my uncle, a post-Harlem Renaissance man himself. He taught me and I had created well over 20 paintings, and collected works over the years, even commissioned several works. So I asked, and Michelle made us a deal we could live with, and we purchased the Gaulhiac work. We even went so far as to have her come to our home and had an unveiling with some 50 friends we invited over. Michelle did a great job talking about Gaulhiac's work, what his process was, and how he meshed and threaded African arts, ritual, symbols, and mythology and Cuban culture all in one. I immediately became enamored with the work because it spoke so sharply and directly to my creative spaces and drives. I asked her if she could connect me with the artist. I wanted to know about the colors. I wanted to know about the textures, how he saw them, blended them. Then I wanted to use those images to better project what I was hearing in my head, feeling in my soul, and shaking my aesthetic spiritual fists at the world too.

Messing with other people's heads. The power that does that, that controls, is what we all are trying to debunk. Michelle made that call for me to Gaulhiac.

Later, within a year, she invited a group of recent buyers to travel to Cuba with her to meet the artists and make further purchases directly. This could be facilitated on a person-to-person cultural exchange. I had been, as well, teaching in my ethnomusicology and music and culture courses that included Cuba—just surface stuff: Buena Vista Social Club, music, and the African presence in the music. I was not serving the culture.

But each time I saw those films and listened to those musicians talk about their experiences, every time I discussed the relevance of these retentions with students, the more I saw myself in their stories in many

ways. The more I viewed Gaulhiac's works, the deeper that call became. And so the trip was a continuation of a longer heed to my global interests as a youngster, my growing up as a young artist in the diaspora, and as an academic and teacher, thinking about the implications of artists globally and what that "call sounds like," and drawn into a creative need to better reach a shared idea with another artist's work.

The meeting of Gaulhiac in his home studio in November of 2012 was like the meeting of a distant brother working on the other side of the world.

Michelle had exchanged e-mails, letting him know I was coming and that I wanted to have a dialogue about a collaboration of music and art somehow. He said, "Of course."

In the months of preparation, my preparations were surface at first. I read articles, listened to more music deeply, brushed up on my Spanish, tried to prepare myself for a world of images, feelings, history, and culture I knew nothing of really. Cuba is a different place.

And soon, six months after my purchase, I was heading to Cuba to meet this painter, study the culture, and extend that arts search we are always on.

The reason for going to Cuba the first time was to connect with artists. Not only did the company who chartered Michelle's trip, directed by Silvia Wilhelm, work to make the artist connections, she knew of my interest and work as a composer, performer, and a thinker on these cultural issues. She called directors at the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA), local musicians, and educators, who in turn contacted me, and we were in dialogue weeks before I arrived.

For me, right away, Gaulhiac's work had an important political edge on it, which signaled again, how does power allow one to mess with other people's heads? As an artist, you are always concerned with exploring, critiquing, putting "in check" that power, and giving agency to people to be in control of their own lives and their own voices.

Secondly, the richness of textures and colors—for me, as a composer, this translates and overlaps to mean harmonies, colors, moods, textures and melodies, motion and rhythm, and line and counterpoint. For Gaulhiac, it was visual and sound too. When you look at a painting, you can feel the energy and the rhythm. So when we got together and listened to my music, he started moving his hands, and I started moving my hands

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as if we were painting the sounds in the air. As he heard the rise in the sounds, he also saw that energy and heard what was representative of creating sound, which is actually one of our universal languages, that communication among artists of the seeing and being in the world.

Over the next year, we decided to collaborate on a piece that was reflective of various thinking and creative processes that we both could employ.

He listens to my music, I study his paintings—paintings and music that are birthed through similar things and creative processes. And we saw them and heard them together, working in the United States, and premiered the piece a year later in Cuba. These reflections represent both visits, in 2012 and 2013.

Cuba, what it is and means, brings me into dreams. Not exoticism, but it breathes of people, spiritual-creative energy, cultural oceans, and a character of the old world captured in new definitions of what we must become. And all those contradictions are a living energy. This translates too into authentic creativity, which is the use of your tones, expressions, and reflections to experience human condition creatively.

Cuba Forward

I returned from Cuba, the first time, in November of 2012, after a short but intense week of engaging Andrea Shea, a public radio journalist who had accompanied us on the trip. When she returned, she spent several weeks at the end of 2012 crafting a radio special highlighting various aspects of the trip. The report was divided into three parts, the third, looking at music. Part 1 was “Cuba’s Art Scene Flourishes, with a Little Help from Boston,” and part 2, “Artists Pioneer Cuba’s Changing Economy.”

The first two parts were a more general, social, cultural, economic, and political journey through current society and meaning. But in part 3, Andrea’s report did more for our field of contemporary ethnomusicology than I could have imagined. By her reporting on the people, she placed the term and the current work in our field out there for common everyday listeners to witness firsthand. And let’s be clear to exactly what that means. She followed our interactions with local Cuban musicians in five separate Cuban musical exchange settings: folk songs from the street, new

Cuban chamber music, Afro-Cuban jazz, music training in the academy, and Cuban hip-hop and Cuban rock.

The meanings and cultural implications are wide here, and that young Cuban artists were engaging in such a diverse range of creativity in the arts is tremendous.

“A Berklee Professor Dives into Cuba’s Vast Music Scene” by Andrea Shea (NPR, January 16, 2013)

Berklee College of Music professor Bill Banfield knew he’d find music on the streets of Old Havana, he just didn’t know how much. On our first full day we run into a guitarist singing about the Cuban Revolution. Bill saddles up next to him and does his best to sing along.

In the U.S. people walk by street musicians, but in Cuba it’s a state-licensed job. If you stop to listen, you’re expected to pay, and musicians are around every corner. Let’s just say Bill is in heaven.

“Crazy! Over the Moon and freaking Saturn,” Bill gushed, explaining the significance of street players in Havana’s musical ecosystem. “Cause they sing the songs of the people.”

When Bill hears chamber music coming out of an ancient church he stops in his tracks. Inside, he’s floored to see Zenaida Romeu, a famous Cuban conductor, rehearsing with her all-female orchestra, free and open to the public. Banfield compares it to stumbling in on Leonard Bernstein.

Bill’s agenda for this trip includes jamming with a lot of Cuban musicians. He even brought along his new crimson rose colored Epiphone guitar. But as an educator and ethnomusicologist with a focus on the African diaspora, he also hopes to make authentic connections with Cuban people. He wants to learn about their lives and plant seeds for future collaborations.

It’s like the professor tells his students at Berklee, “Milk doesn’t come from a carton, it comes from a cow.

“I think it’s the same with art and culture. It doesn’t come from an Internet website, it doesn’t come from ‘American Idol’, you know, art and musical expression come out of the living lives of people,” Bill continued. “When you go to a place that sees that up at the top of the human codes, that’s extraordinary.”

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Musicians here have a kind of diplomatic immunity. They're like cultural ambassadors with a universal language.

A Chamber Orchestra to Hip-Hop

Our first musical ambassador, Edgardo Gonzalez, is a rapper, producer and member of the Cuban hip-hop group Doble Filo.

Edgardo joins us on the tour bus and he and Bill hit it off immediately. They met via email, but now they're talking like old buddies about the blues, salsa, American jazz and Cuban pop. Edgardo explains how Cuba's isolation has forced musicians to improvise their own sound.

"And that I find fascinating about Cuba, because it's out of the lack of information [that we get] this crazy mixture of things," Edgardo said.

"But that whole thing is a formula for Cuban survival across the board," Bill added.

Edgardo, Bill and I head to La Zorra y el Cuervo—or The Fox and the Crow—a famous jazz club. When we get there the hip-hop artist arranges for Bill to perform with some young, A-list Cuban musicians. Bill climbs on stage with his new guitar and plays a few American jazz standards. He is hoping to forge relationships with musicians like the guys he's on stage with.

Last-Minute Jam Session

The next day when we go to the Instituto Superior de Arte, or ISA, we meet 34-year-old pianist Denis Peralta. As our next musical ambassador, Denis connects Bill to school administrators, but also throws together a last-minute jam session on campus.

We follow him to a large common room filled with more than a dozen young Cuban musicians. Some are here just to catch a glimpse of the American professor from Berklee, others are showing him their chops.

Bill pulls his guitar out of the case and plugs into an amp. Then he jumps onto the piano and finds his groove with an amazing 20-something flute player.

Everyone is smiling. When it's over, a brilliant trumpet player, named Jeffrey Valdez, approaches Bill to say he'll be touring the U.S. this year.

“I would like to invite you to one of our shows, I’m playing with some bands in Boston,” the 29-year-old told him. Valdez has been playing his instrument since he was 10.

All of the musicians here seem to know about Berklee College of Music. In fact, Denis, a professional composer and musician, received a partial scholarship to Berklee last year, but couldn’t afford the remaining \$40,000 for tuition.

Music school in Cuba is free but, Denis says, it’s very expensive to sustain that.

“My school, ISA, for example, each musician uses an instrument given by the school—an instrument to learn and to play. They need pianos and all the equipment,” he said.

Off the Tourist Track

Bill sees this visit to the Cuban music school as the beginning of a long-term relationship. But as satisfying as that is, the explorer wants to go deeper. He hopes to find something way off the tourist track. And we do.

A few hours later, Bill, Denis, Edgardo and I go somewhere that was not on the professor’s itinerary. Not even close. It’s kind of like finding the dodo or a musical holy grail.

We discover the band Hypnosis, playing Cuban-style industrial/emo/heavy metal, at a government-run rock club in central Havana. All five members of the band have hair down to their knees. They’re clad in leather. We’re here because Edgardo’s girlfriend, DJ Joyce Alvarez, known as BJoyce, opened for the band. Bill, a classically trained jazz musician and composer, is way out of his element.

When we get out of the club, I ask Bill what he thought of the Cuban rock.

“Fabulous. I wouldn’t have known that I was in Cuba with that. They had learned, copied, emulated or appropriated all of the nuances and the style and the techniques. They had all the equipment,” he said. “So they were thrashing baby, they were hitting in hard. I would never have imagined.”

When we leave the rock club at 1 a.m. we can’t find a cab, so Denis takes us to another place tourists never go—on a ride in a Cuban cab.

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There are two types of cabs in Havana, just like there are two types of pesos: one for Cubans and one for tourists. Denis directs us to dark street corner and tells us to be quiet. A geriatric, 1950s era American jalopy pulls up and we get in.

Even though he's totally freaked out walking through central Havana at night, Bill feels like he accomplished what he came here to do—with Denis's help.

"Yes, a cab ride, a Cuban *bottero*, a pure taxi for Cubans, it's like something you can't pay for. I'm trying to give you the Cuban sensation," Denis said. "I know you study ethnomusicology, well you need to know the ethno part, that's what I'm trying to give you."

And like an old friend, Denis makes fun of how nervous Bill was in that uncharted cab ride.

"Whoa, we were in hell, hell! We're in danger, we're in danger!" Denis joked. "You were scared!"

Denis says five days is not long enough to experience all of the music Cuba has to offer, so Bill has plans to fly back in February.

* * *

That last line for me was the defining piece of our exchanges that allowed me to share with the host, Denis, my Cuban musician friend. That his engagement and sharing with me gave me the "ethno part" was transformative.

Cuba Notes—November 19, 2012, 6:40 A.M.

The Process Forward Essay: "Talking Paper"

I recently traveled to Cuba. My life was taken to a new level of appreciating the world I live in. Because Cuba is so clouded from us in a mysterious wrap about its social, political, and cultural systems, such trips—and, more importantly, such rich cultural explorations—provide important connections that allow people to interact and learn and grow. People-to-people exchange is so important in moving culture appreciation forward.

My trip was one that focused on Cuban painters, and as well I got to exchange with Cuban musicians. What I learned most was from young

Cuban artists, that passion, craft, commitment to culture, and a hope of the future are of a highest order to define our humanity.

After being here, having performed at the local jazz club, working with a contemporary hip-hop producer, visiting the young college artists at ISA and the homes and studios of leading Cuban artists, studying culture and history, I felt totally connected with the history in motion.

A Vision Statement

It occurred to me while being inspired by this incredible culture that there could be institutes, some sort of cultural/artistic exchange mechanism, in colleges and institutions that are designed specifically for students, scholars, and artists who want to focus on the creative engagement of young artists. Talking about cultural—intergenerational cultural—ideas seems critical.

The most fertile and true exchange that we are all invested in and believe in is cultural exchange—the kind that comes to mind when you follow dialogues in arts, music, and cultural historical narratives. This is the power of the arts to create, carry (the messages of meaning), charge (to be imbued with those meanings), change (to be a part of the working forward), critique (question injustice), cultivate (plant, grow more ideas), and connect community in culture (the 7 Cs of culture). These points guide all of these essays in ethnomusicology.

If we could create and sustain such a refocused agenda that is always contemporarily relevant—that would be rich. This has inspired me to think even more about a mobile, “in the box,” dual-platform compatible program or an online hybrid model website as an education and culture exploration tool. Perhaps it would contain music of many cultures, interviews with various musicians across styles, poets, cultural aestheticians, all connected through similar questions about cultural relevance, process, history, and approaches to being creative contemporarily.

It will be a portable electronic toolkit with films, music, curriculum, and poetry that is used to enhance what the dialogue and education focus is about, including proposed program ideas, concert formats, and discussion themes and concepts that people can wrap themselves in to create discussion around why, how, and when a cultural creation is used and to benefit people.

I think we have to look at not only cultural relevance but also at examining what is more easily sustainable.

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Then you have to think about, out of this dialogue comes, deliverables: recording, essays of reflection, compositions that are collaborative, concerts, paintings, documentation.

This is no new idea, but what keeps it current is the idea of cultural relevance. You must have, at the core, young artists who are connected to music, culture, and society, and using that as a lens and a lead to guide artistic excellence.

These ideas are growing out of dialogue that is relevant to these artists. Painters, poets, composers, and musicians have a rich, vital view of the world. It's cultural, it's about the people in the world, and this rich exchange is an important view on where we are and what we hope and build to become. That kind of back-and-forth exchange and creative expression is the dynamic that is at the core of this enterprise, this "Diaspora Dialogues in Music and Culture."

Students and participants can learn and think reflectively about engaging creatively with the society we live in by looking critically at the models, icons, and what they symbolize (Pablo Picasso, Mary Lou Williams, Bob Marley, and Jean-Michel Basquiat, for example), the movements and the artistic movement leaders who changed and inspired the world with their artistic vision. This creates a different kind of thinking about the world. That kind of back-and-forth is a dynamic of thought and creative vision that we can learn and benefit from.

Process, Parts, Procedure

Before being there, I imagined Cuba was like a beautiful mystery that you know but don't know the tales, though you know the pictures. You know this place and yet you know nothing about it. What a fascinating narrative and complex story of modern revolution, modern society, arts culture, African diaspora, Spanish old world, embracing to all, yet a closed, unified, one-political-ideology socialist marvel. For me, Cuba has been an interesting forward formula that leads me to an aesthetic paradigm pedagogy of process.

These are mechanical entities that are maintained, mechanized because they are inventively repute together, are utilized, and thrive. They thrive forward and are motivated within a "different social/political system." You can see this in the arts and hear it in synergy, energy, rhythmic cultural spiritual dynamism across mixes of hip-hop, jazz, contemporary expression,

representation, contemporary culture, and contemporary times. Here we have incredible models for processes that are productive; that have social, spiritual, religious, humanistic, and political cross-pollination; that are vibrant, ritualistic constructions of real relevant meaning and value. They are celebratory and critical too, because they critique the culture and carry it too. Think about the potential richness of an intergenerational, diasporic, cultural exchange and embrace between African American culture/history and global culture in modernity.

A crucial, critical, cultural spiritual link in Cuban culture is Africa. More than 1,300,000 enslaved Africans were brought and left in Cuba; their cultural practice of the Orisha, gods that live in and with your head that keep you “aware and present,” is powerfully present. Those some 205+ tribes—Yoruban, from Benin, Congo—left a deep spiritual-cultural-spiritual praxis (your own individual energy naturally connected with your destiny in God).

We’ve seen African American artists in Paris. We’ve seen Cuban artists in America (Buena Vista Social Club) but what we have not seen until more recently is African, African artists in Cuba, in cultural/arts “think tanks.” That back-and-forth seen earlier with Afro Cuban, Dizzy, bebop, Chano Pozo in Harlem, could be contemporarily revisited. Contemporary hip-hop has been the most visible expression examining cross-pollination of diasporic creative exchange and inspirations of young artistry.

A small significant and consistent exchange could provide a sustainable, deliverable, and useful exploration of the meanings of cultural exchange and what it gains us. Such creative environments produce a sustainable feeling for the people; the idea is people, inspiration, innovation, ingenuity, which is what keeps this relevant. People have to feel it’s a culturally relevant narrative being.

November 19, 2012

After being here for five days, I noticed they all share a kind of optimism, a “quiet optimism” that is spiritual about Cuba.

Training young artists, ethnomusicologists, gives us a deliverable model of cultural exchanges and worldviews through talks and creative expressions that are documentable. The Cuban cultural society core of arts, education, and health care and a system for the people is a great model, although still in progress and process.

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The specific music formulas that I see are the combinations of Afro-Cuban rhythms and resonances that create an energy that is musical and stylistic. The intentionality of rhythmic vitality as an integral part of the aesthetic base of this music is intellectual. An analysis of the sonorities and rhythmic language would be a powerful compositional study to see and, even more potent, would be to examine how the community creates and exchanges to provide a language and performance practice base, an aesthetic that is of use and of value.

I watched several contemporary Cuban pianists playing with ensembles. The pianists all played the piano with ripping dexterity harmonically, melodically, and rhythmically. Each pianist played the piano as a conga drum, and played with the drummer in a way that shows a fluidity, a commonality with rhythmic dynamism.

That unbrokenness with African rhythm and communal connectivity to the grounding spirit of the music, mixed meter, complex harmonies, and melodic inventiveness, improvisation, collective improvisation, and tight interplay is instructive for modern music ensemble playing. Yet the craft, concentration, exchange, and force of ideas create an unparalleled music and continuum of ideas. Everyone who knows, who studies, or who listens to Cuban music knows this, but what a great lesson to explore and take away from this model!

Zora Neale Hurston in the Deep South of the 1930s and '40s transcribed with this music and literature, vernacular-based premise, and it produced an authentic cultural-spiritual approach that was explorative but not dry academic. Cultural exchange is a more rich talk; what happens when people who believe in and live in an exchange bring about a “different view and practice” among people?

I think, too, in working with hip-hop artists here, it allows a real discussion about current music and technology trends that have completely changed and are changing the way young artists see themselves and engage in new languages and approaches to document and distribute their ideas, styles, and “new song.”

The Cuban Connect and International Motion Forward

In a January 4, 2013, *New York Times* article by Victoria Burnett, “A New Era’s Filmmakers Find Their Way in Cuba,” Burnett highlights

the tug forward and back between progressives and the state. The article reflects the questions, the spark of hope among youth art progressives, yet the ambiguous nature of the beast of state control, and what that really means or how it is shifting.

The global boom in digital filmmaking has rippled across Cuba over the past decade, letting filmmakers create their work beyond the oversight of state-financed institutions. Independent movies have become a new means of expression in a country where, despite freedoms and economic reforms introduced by President Raúl Castro since 2006, the state still carefully controls national press, television and radio, and access to the Internet is very limited.

“They’re bringing fresh ideas; they’re experimenting,” said Javier Ernesto Alejándrez, 21, a humanities student waiting in line last month to see the independent feature *Pablo*, shown as part of a film festival.

“There’s a lot of creativity, and they are really thinking about stuff,” said Alexandra Halkin, the director of the Americas Media Initiative, a nonprofit group that distributes and promotes Cuban film overseas. “They just need more tools and more space.”

Painters and musicians to me seemed more vocal, more free to express themselves, and clearly are not as digitally bound, except in the case of contemporary hip-hop artists. But music in particular is more easily producible and still the most potent form of youth and social expression. I interviewed one of the leading young hip-hop artists, Edgardo González, and he shared,

Hip-hop I think is really explicit, but it doesn’t allow you to enjoy the whole spectrum of what’s possible. It has a speech, that is a story about someone, or what someone wants you to think. But music has to be like poetry. It has a speech but at the same time allows you to experience it different ways. That way, each person that listens will have a whole world of feelings to connect with inside. That’s what I want to do with my music, with the hip-hop language. It’s like composing music. You have to think outside the box. It doesn’t have to follow the same line that you have a speech, rap, that talks about just the issues that hip-hop talks about. You have to mix it up. And that is the thing, when you’re young; you have to be exposed to a lot of music. I think music is one language it doesn’t matter. If you happen to be closer to hip-hop, that

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just means a lot of the music you use comes from that, but if you use Afro-Cuba, Brazilian, funk, you are going to put that into it. If you read poetry, read film, you can put those kinds of emotions and translate that experience into music.

Conclusions

It is clear to me that international connection and exchange is the next page of the journey forward. Beyond the beauty of the people and the country, it is as well the tremendous opportunity, especially now, to have engagement and what that can mean. Because the emphasis here is on arts and culture education, the young people are trained to excel in these areas, with pride, and there is a cultural apparatus in place to support that. Cuba is a society of intellectuals too, and artists, and so there is a very high level of cultural artistic talk and play in play all around.

They, the musicians, respect our traditions and artistry, and of course their training and abilities are “off the chain.” But I found they are not jaded as much as we are; they feel empowered and are given agency, so well as a “proper place” in their society as artists.

In all the cases I’ve seen, the artists live “elevated and valued,” and many artists such as cartoonists and singers are actually paid by the state. At the university there are options for the best skilled, and these young artists have been trained since they were very young and have a genuine interest in the arts and its power to “say something” of depth.

That is moving me the most: the potential of young artists to carry the culture forward. Also, the people are beautiful in their inner souls, so gracious but grounded in who they are.

The people base their cultural values on the premise that they exist because of a revolution. Whatever we think about that social contract is, in my mind, inconsequential to the reality that this is a place where African identity reigns regarded and consequential, which does not exist for us in the States.

That power of Africanism and a consequential cultural value that counts, connected to artistic power, voice, and forward thinking, is a formula one cannot resist. Contemporary Cuban cultural capital is very rich, I feel.

What I learned specifically was that painters, poets, composers, and musicians have a rich, vital view of the world. It’s cultural; it’s about the

people in the world. Those kinds of interchanges and creative expressions are the dynamic that is at the core of this, I think.

I made many friends in Cuba, artists and thinkers, but also local, everyday people with lives that matter and connect to my life—and now, I matter more.

This experience literally changed the direction of my life, made me grow and come to realize so many connections there are in our world that are vital and enriching.

What I learned most, though, is from young Cuban artists: their passion, craft, and commitment to culture is a forward movement and is of the highest order to define our humanity.

If we could create a small mobile institute model that could make a regular, sustainable creative, educational collective between these artists, educators, and a few institutions, we would have a deliverable model.

February 2013

I traveled back to Cuba in February 2013 to continue the exploration of music, culture, and people in Cuba.

I was corrected early on, and rightfully so, that I had not been exploring “all of Cuban culture” during my first visit. First, my week there in November 2012 was to Havana. And second, I had focused not enough on the broader range of Cuban folk music. And yet another concern was that I needed to make a distinction between cosmopolitan and rural music as the focus, and that the discussion with musicians needed to be focused on historical development as well as contemporary experience. I wanted to refine my writing journey in Havana, follow up on discussions and associations I began, teach there in ISA, dig deeper into the social/cultural questions in contemporary cosmopolitan Havana, make some trips to rural culture, and talk more in depth with contemporary Cubans about the real world they live, work, and make music through in Cuba today. My main focus, however, is still urban Havana and contemporary culture and how that is negotiated against the backdrop of national Cuban society and history.

I always check in with myself with “Why?” In these two visits, I had spent time documenting my experiences in Cuba; at that time, our nation had undergone a shift in its relation with this important global neighbor. Because of the restrictions, perhaps fewer other artists had been able to

have this opportunity, and it was time to document those critical cultural shifts. The essays on contemporary culture and the discussions with artists bring light to how these were negotiating and relating to the daily dance we have to perform, and how their reactions to this were recorded. In this way, to report on the culture, to create from it, and to lift it up for others to be inspired is, I say, always our great example to uphold. Cultural reporting is essential, because it is the measure and the example of how we live in our world.

I had been musing around and sent a note to a bunch of friends running some of these ideas by them, and hoping my focus had been rebooted efficiently.

February 16, 2013: A Letter to Friends

The idea of a journey back this second time was also thinking about something I'm calling the search for cultural relevancy. I feel these questions about what and how human creative activity has meaning in culture, how it matters to the people, is my challenging question. Too much has been reduced to buying stuff.

That is what I have meant by arts and humanities: human subject matters and how people live in the world.

What, then, are we demanding from our culture and what contributes to the furtherance, deepening, understanding of our codes? This, in my mind, is what I want to deal with in Cuba, with young people.

So this time I will:

1. In Cuba, my priority is writing about my experience while I'm there, following up on discussions I had with local artists of note, getting a sense of what modern young artists/thinkers in Havana (mainly) are doing and thinking, and to try and understand where the crossroads of tradition, modernity, and the current mix of "global cultural capital" plays into their identity as modern artists. What do they have to overcome, give up, and gain to be relevant? What do they most value, and what are their processes for negotiating all this, now as their society and culture are experiencing some shifts, politically?

2. Get down into some music and collaborate with my Cuban artist friends there, to create some new stuff in music, art, interdisciplinary process.
3. Look at how the social differences still occur in uneven Internet access, at differing levels, and how they negotiate this. How is expression mediated against a current Cuban government that is in negotiation and shifting in global relations in contemporary “new marketplaces”?
4. Many young people listen to American popular forms today and, despite the perceived cutoff from American influences in thought, all the Cuban youth I hung out with were dressed in popular culture dress and swag from jeans to tattoos and piercing. That surprised me! So, I’m interested in how that global popular culture is negotiated against powerful Cuban social-historical codes that are equally powerful. How does this current generation manage that, and what implications does this have on Cuban thought and cultural identity going forward?
5. I will as well be visiting the ISA, composers, and musicologists, sharing my music and perspectives on music and culture.

In this exchange, I hope to forge an education/culture exchange whereby we address these issues among educators, and see if the education and curriculum address arts, identity, and creative approaches today globally.

Day 1—Tuesday, February 19

We—composer Denis Peralta and I—left the hotel and headed out to ISA (Institute of Superior Arts) on the east side of Havana in a residential section called Miramar. Denis explained that this side of Havana was designed post-1920 and was lined with mansions now functioning as embassies, well-equipped studios, and municipal/government buildings. ISA lies just about 15 kilometers in the interior of the east side. We arrived, and on the way to the offices, Denis was met with a parade of old friends glad to see him. This is his home, he was trained here through his master’s, and returning now for advanced degrees in composition,

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ethnomusicology. As we make our way to the main office to drop my equipment off, I am introduced to a Japanese graduate student, Rieko Tomaka, an anthropologist from the University of Tokyo studying on a Fulbright scholarship.

She was the first island on my journey through ISA this time. She is here studying Cuban music as an anthropologist, exploring the relationship of music and Cuban culture in its own social-cultural history. I knew I was on warm tracks.

The class with ISA students was incredible. The composers, three faculty historians, a theorist, players, producers, and a great group of about 15–20 students came to hear and talk about music. After a long introduction where I tried to fill in my life's work in 15 minutes, I asked if there were at this point any questions, and a young woman asked, "Can you tell us what you do, once your music is commissioned—how does it get out there, reach the audiences, what happens after that?" I shared with them the ways that music gets out through performances, ASCAP title registration, and public radio programs. She was not impressed. The distance from the creator, then to crowd, then to credit, seemed odd and formulaic to her. I was moved here by these students who were interested in process but as well wanted practical tips about how to get their music out there. I found out the next day that she and others found the idea of waiting to do a commission for music a "naturally weird idea," although they too aspire to be composers. But this opened a deeper discussion about their aspirations and challenges in their own music and culture. I then met with Mariana Hevia, dean of the Music Department.

After she welcomed me, we went into a long but helpful discussion about the mechanisms here at ISA for building an ongoing, regular institutional relationship. I was encouraged to pursue this, and I will. I think the experience with the ISA students this time was meaningful, because we exchanged ideas.

My entire premise for the need, the rationale, for such an exchange was that it only matters if both sides can benefit from engaging. We learn together about the art, about the culture, and we inspire each other to better understand our shared world. There are several huge steps to establishing a real institutional partnership, which can only come through my connection with Berklee College, at present. I had hoped as an independent scholar-artist, but it doesn't work that way. I understand. Much of that conversa-

tion was on trying to figure out the best way to mechanize such a regular institutional partnership, which is positive.

Day 2—Wednesday, February 20

I think I felt that yesterday's trip and the sharing at ISA was most successful. The main thing I was clearly able to communicate and the idea stream that I was able to mutually break into was artistic identity, the dedication an artist needs to that, and the navigation of an equal balance of focus on art, craft training, and the people.

To be able to encourage young artists to “stay on,” to not be dissuaded by adults and institutions, and to be dedicated on your art is one thing. But secondly, after a piercing question from one of the students about how I make the choice of allegiances between commissions and doing “my music for me,” I took off the academic hat, sat down close to these 20-odd Cuban musicians, and we shared. I was able to say clearly, “It’s all good. These are wonderful problems to have as we work through together figuring out how we should evaluate and solve these issues, but it’s good that it is among us. I think it’s good to sit down and have these conversations among us, to care for the music, the people, and us. It’s better to have this problem of figuring out the hope or the destiny of the music with ourselves than with someone in an office who does not care about the music.”

A Mexican student, raised up in frustration, suggested that it would take a “super-musician” to be able to withstand all the issues and fight for the cause, and we only have so much energy to combat.

I guess my heart began to swell up with joy, because while there are obstacles for any group of young musicians, more for the Cubans who want to actively engage in mainstream global culture via the Internet, the common identity still was artistry and its way out to the people. We all share that common language and “space,” as my friend Denis articulates, and it’s a universal expression, a consciousness, that all active artists are tapped into, a creator’s consciousness.

My students in Boston have concerns about many of the same things the young artists in Cuba are grappling with. The other thing that came both from the older pedagogy professor and the students was their concern about their “vernacular Cuban traditions” being washed away by popular culture—that somehow their own nonmusical colleagues don’t

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look to the old forms anymore for their “identity,” they only want the popular music. Well, that is almost the same problem with young musicians in the United States, except that the popular music is “our native tongue.” What’s different is who controls it and its artistic directions. Our industry is dictated by powerful megacultural commercial gamesmanship of advertising dollars and false popularity criteria.

The ISA professor had one of her composition students play an example of one of his piano works. This was an extremely gifted, classically trained young man who played brilliantly. His work was self-consciously nationalistic, with traces—like Rubalcaba, Chucho Valdés—of Cuban ethnic materials and melodies, all wrapped in a complex mesh of rhythms and harmonies, both neoromantic, avant-garde jazz, and fusion, just all mixed.

In his work was a spirit of nationalism that implied a “wonder” of who you are from a soil, what you aspire, and how that aspiration is of critical relevance.

The other issue they expressed was their commitment to being artists who respect “the people,” even in their “special-select-trained status.”

They did not want to become “voices of the academy.” The other thing that impressed me was their hunger for the “good, right stuff.” They wanted training books on orchestration, they wanted scores, they wanted the “accepted techniques” so they could learn systems of thought to apply to their craft and training. I found that very humbling. That is, they didn’t want fluff stuff from YouTube, they were interested in all things for the good of the development of their craft. They didn’t want candy or glistening sparkly junk; they wanted information and real info about their craft. That made me proud.

Yet another idea that was clear: They all see themselves being contributing musicians in the culture they live in.

In Cuba, in Havana, a musician who is talented can make money as a musician and can be seen, respected, and paid in their culture as a musician. Apart from whatever one may think about this in terms of control, regulations, underfreedom, or underpay, this speaks powerfully to the ideals of being in the arts, the gratification of being able to do what you were “born to be.”

Being in the States these days, the feeling of “being in the arts” is not as safe an endeared identity—it’s more an endangered identity.

This idea of an artist's quest for the sustainability of their artistic identity has been and will be forever a sustained reality of artistic production. From hip-hop to Bessie Smith, Picasso to Beethoven, artists have been screaming for their identity as an equal partner, an attached stream of voicing to what they are in the world

Day 3—Thursday, February 21

Day 3, or evening 3 this second trip, can only be described as one of the most musical nights of my life. We walked the streets of Old Havana at night, had coconut ice cream in the shell, ate chocolate, dined in the café in the Plaza Vieja, and listened to local bands all through the night. I was given my first lessons on the Cuban tres. I gave guitar lessons on jazz, sat around a piano and sang, was played to, then was serenaded along the Malecón oceanfront. Truly amazing!

Local music was my dominant focus this time, and direct discussions with local musicians about their experiences, cultural education, and national feelings, and their questions and thinking about their place in the culture as artists. This time, I jammed with local professional musicians, not jazz players, but everyday working musicians in the styles of the local music and songs. Again, I really wanted to play the Cuban tres. I sat with and sang traditional songs on guitar.

I also played piano as we sang in a restaurant—get this—“Amazing Grace.” I also filmed local professional trios, quartets, sextets, singers, and players as I observed local people reacting to their musicians.

This aspect, while seemingly obvious, never gets old. We musicians operate fundamentally as players in the craft of music knowledge, and this goes a long way to establishing a relationship. This is essential. I hung out in Old Havana downtown, in Capital Square where the old and young guys fuss, seemingly violently, enraged for hours about baseball, their national sport. I thought Boston was sports *sin cabeza*, which I learned is “without the head”—that is, crazy. Ha!

But what I was able to “get in with” was the authentic spirit of when music is made and connects to the local spirit and usage. I think that's when you note the difference in how the people “read and use the art,” the songs, the occasions for music. Music may be entertaining, it may be a cultural sound, but it sure ain't disposable in Cuba. It's not background.

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It matters here in the way people see the sounds existing around them, like the air matters. This is not just a poetic romantic read. Music making is a realistic part of the texture in living every day, and all night too. I walked along the Malecón, beyond midnight, and the local people just have their axes (guitars) out strolling and singing and playing songs to themselves.

And in the parks at night, local lovers are strumming guitars and singing romantic songs to their ladies. Now that's something I have never seen. I have gotten a deeper, inside view of the meanings of music in everyday urban Cuban life and learned a lot about the daily routine of people. Yet another interesting piece was watching how young Cuban musicians negotiate their academic, home, and professional lives.

I taught with musicians in class at ISA, and I saw them later at night on their professional gigs. During the day, they studied composition, pedagogy and harmony systems, and orchestration; then at night, they were singing local music as professionals or hired musicians by the state. So this very much matches my own students who are with me in the classroom, but then at night doing general business ("GB") gigs. While that's not alarming, it further emphasizes the point that music making here among Cuban artists in the big city (the capital is not far) is not that different from what young working, studying, aspiring professional musicians are doing anywhere in the world—except, of course, that many of these musicians are employed or given license to work.

This morning I met Loania who was playing at a local hotel. I was immediately drawn to her because of her image as she so strikingly resembled Esperanza Spalding—a connection you could not miss. And she was swinging hard! And so I asked her after if we could talk.

She was very gracious.

Bill: How many years have you been playing bass here? You remind me of a friend, Esperanza.

She laughed and told me how much she admired Esperanza and was a fan of her work.

Loania: Realistically, I actually play the electric bass.

She had switched to upright just recently for these gigs.

Bill: Do you work regularly here in Havana?

Loania: Yes, four or five days a week.

She was playing with a trio of flute, guitar, and bass. The repertoire was mixed, some jazz, Carlos Jobim, American standards, "Shadow of Your Smiles," and Cuban traditional songs. I commented to her how much of a variety I had been hearing in Cuba.

Loania: The music in Cuba today is a mix, but this is my roots. I was born hearing the music this way.

And this for me mirrors what my buddy here Denis Peralta says about music.

Denis: We as artists have a privilege here in Cuba because we are on a different frequency than the people who conquer the world. This is one of the best places to do music. We are left alone to communicate in our own language, communicating a common language that we have as musicians. That gives us a very special situation—the space and condition we have as artists.

The local people respect this because our way of living projects a different way, more free. We have a special happiness, different from the normal people. But too I think one of the reasons is we are misunderstood, but in a very good way, because this lets us be ourselves and communicate in our own language. Artists are always traveling. We are always known and sharing with people all over the world and communicating. Communicating also our experiences of being Cuban, our traditions, our attachment to African, European, American styles. That too gives us a special situation.

Socially, the normal people who are scientists, workers, they respect the artists a lot because of the opportunity to have independent incomes. But also because our way of living, projecting, shows a different way of things, more free. But the opportunity to live about your art, your creations, your performances, and your ideas, or dreams coming through is immense!

That's the goal in life, my friend, when you can make your realities your dreams is the highest level of living.

I have friends who are painters who are just painting freely. They don't have any pressure from the market.

Bill: But how do they sustain, survive for themselves, food, rent?

Denis: If you become an artist, you have your own language; you have your own expression being authentic. Because you can sell them for a price that is very high. A painting is maybe 50 CUC (equivalent to about 1 U.S. dollar), one hour's work. But a doctor here receives 30 CUCs for a month's work.

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Bill: So how does the artist receive, what is the channel for the money?

Denis: There are public art markets, allowing artists to sell their work. But the artists are “known” too and can be linked to galleries outside of Cuba. The plastic arts [painting, sculpture] are very high. The musicians are in a good situation, a second level, because of the respect for the music throughout the world. Because of our traditions, the African rhythms that are part of the base of our culture, all the components that build up and are strong in us, beautiful, and are interesting that make our situation, very good. Cuba has been a very influential in the world. The mambo, cha cha cha, *son cubano*, these become rhythms for the world. Musicians too are always traveling outside. There are the actors and theater people. But here too there is a privilege, as it is not difficult to organize a group. And you are paid, you have a place to practice and perform. And there is an audience who will come.

Bill: Who are the audiences?

Denis: Everybody can go to the theater to see the best show, because it's state institution supported. The prices are fixed and very low, because the government has a priority of arts and sports. To go to the best game is like 1 peso. Every Cuban can go to the stadium to see the sports. For everybody, and sometimes it's free. Open and free for the people! In the arts, a ticket for a performance might be 5 pesos. Everybody can go to the theater. Many free concerts, great concerts. The highest price might be 20 pesos, which is less than a dollar. But we have a problem, the global situation. The globalization and the power of the media. The interest for the fine arts and the art of creation is going down, down. It's because of the press of the media, which is giving more importance to commercial products, which we know is not well done, some poor constructed products. These become famous. But they are not doing anything new, it just sells well. And that happens here!

Interlude I

What follows is a conversation with local choreographer Susana Pous. Denis introduced me to his and his wife's friend Susana Pous, a choreographer working in the State Ballet.

Susana: The difference is if you are in Barcelona and you are a dancer, you are probably a poor girl, but here you are an important person because the arts are respected by the people. When I was living in Bar-

celona, everybody asked me, “What are you doing?” And I said, “I’m a dancer.” And they said, “Oh, okay. But what are you doing?” You have to work in other things because it’s impossible to sustain yourself. But here in Cuba, it is easier because you have fine schools for the arts. There are good dancers, and everybody dances, and sings and plays music! And for me as an artist this is spectacular. I have very good dancers working with me. And they don’t have Internet, PlayStation, and they don’t have these distractions and they are always working in that.

Bill: So these young people don’t feel at a disadvantage?

Susana: Yes, they are too thinking about this. If someone forbids you from something, you are always thinking about this. I want to fly, they want to have a computer, of course, and they want these things. But at the same time, they are always using their time creating and expressing what they feel. They have a very strong education, and at the same time they mix with the popular culture. In Barcelona, the classic approaches dominate. But here, everybody dances folklore, dance cabaret, contemporary, and ballet. We are very diverse. It’s very rich, a mix. I mix African movement, elements with Cuban.

Bill: Are you an employee of the state? And how were they open to you as someone from another place to come in and work with younger Cuban artists?

Susana: Yes. They opened up for me a way to do it. It was easy for me. I wanted to live here, they opened the door. I came here my first time with my director, and she was invited to work with the national ballet. I could see my company in this context. I came here, and they said okay, you can teach, try something. I tried one year, and 12 years later, I am still here!

Day 4—Social/Political Reflections

I’m not equipped to understand all the social, economic, or political pieces of a very complex national story. Havana is a city of music, song, architecture, motion, people, and love in spirit. It enwraps so romantically, and yet it is a place of realism and survival and strength, yet tender, youthful, and a part of an ancient world too. I did listen more closely this second visit, and inquire this time directly about ideas of “change and hope” and the larger cultural movement forward. There is a realistic sense that Cuba is changing.

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One huge social example is they are making moves toward gay marriage. One of the pieces of recent popular culture was the movie *Strawberries and Chocolate*. This film was the portrayal of a Cuban gay man that became so popular it in essence made more visible and liberated that community in contemporary Cuba. During the revolution, gay people were imprisoned or sent to army camps. Being gay was against the law. The major administrator today pushing for this reform? Fidel Castro's niece, the daughter of the president.

When Obama became president, his administration continued in essence a democratic positioning that had begun under former president Jimmy Carter to lift some embargo restrictions—first, visiting and travel restrictions on Cuban families, and as it existed under Clinton, people to people, to, in theory, facilitate a lawful educational cultural exchange.

The premise was, if you exposed people to democracy, the people who were exposed to that would help to initiate change. George W. Bush had this in place, but then the position grew hardened again. Many feel the hypocrisy and suspicion exists on both sides of the embargo that fuels this dueling social-political narrative. The Cuban official position was all the problems were due to the embargo, and the United States blames all of the ills on Castro. But this January, the U.S. State Department lifted restrictions officially on those Cuban families, issued more visas allowing more cultural exchange, and the Cuban government lifted for the first time restrictions on Cubans wishing to leave, without penalty—although this has increased the bureaucracy, making it in the immediate term actually more difficult.

Cuba has in place diplomatic relations with close to 180 countries already, so the country is in no way completely cut off. It just seems, it always seemed strange, that there has been such constant bad blood between two places and cultures so “cousin and stone-throw related,” that it is more a curiosity than an insurmountable fix. This curious narrative is underlined by the reality and mythology of Che Guevara, an Argentinian Marxist, a national and global icon who was a top-ranking military commander and a medically trained doctor who led a cultural revolution and created a successful cultural global nation-rebuilding effort that today carries within it 11.2 million people. This is a country and a Caribbean island of major cultural and intellectual standing in history. Today, Cuba is a country with medical doctors, and tourism is its largest industry, but

also where food is rationed out equally to families and a medical doctor makes 25 CUCs (dollars) per month—less than a cab driver or a musician.

These are huge cultural contradictions that again stand out as inexplicable, yet every child can receive a quality education while fulfilling mandatory social service to their community and military service, and can also pursue being a medical doctor free of charge, and all the grandchildren and neighbors receive free medical health care. All these are parts of the Cuban historical-social equation.

A more real connection for me: Edgardo and I subsequently recorded and performed on the road in the United States. His mother as well as a close friend's mother in Cuba are doctors, one a chief of pathology and the other a practicing psychologist. One mom shared with me as she listened to her grandchild crying, "This baby lives in a world of contradictions, he demands eating or sleeping." The other Cuban doctor mom recently used my music with her clients, but I can't write thank you notes to either regularly, because of embargo restrictions on e-mail and Internet blockages, or slow connections that don't allow me to give an electronic shout-out hug to these wonderful mothers. But our connection is there anyway, despite these modern cultural inconveniences. Real Cuban family exchanges between Havana and Miami are much more a matter of serious discussion about conveniences and stressed communication. As one Miami-based Cuban explained to me in our interview, "I haven't been back to Cuba, because it's communist and I'm a very liberal person, and I speak my mind. I will never go back to Cuba. I have family there on both sides, but knowing that they just need money and freedom, and they live out of a book they can only buy certain things. . . . No. I came in the '80s, but the money it takes to go back there. I know it's my country, its beautiful, but—" Julie seemed very intent on seeing Cuba as a poison she didn't want to take.

But, I found out that no one had ever encouraged her to go back home, almost as if this were a hardened political-cultural line. So I suggested it, and she smiled and said, "Well, maybe I will." But many in today's Havana are abuzz about what is called "Cuba's New Now."

If large-scale oil production is merited, the possibilities for the country's economic future are profound. Most of the Cubans I talked to seemed

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consumed, in fact, by the whole idea of possibility. . . . [S]omething big may truly be happening to the way Cubans live day to day. . . . “The rebuilding of the house of Cuba.”

—*National Geographic*, “Cuba on the Edge of Change,”
November 2012

The talk of Cuban changes clearly represents moves due to global or economic pressure, or both. This change in some ways may represent good business and international relations. Many feel the brain drain on Cuba has been devastating, and the apathy among the people is huge, as it is for Julie. The disillusionment over the “failed revolution” is in the heightened voices of the people of all ages, and there seems to be moves, real or intended, that quell that contemporary anger and suspicion. In some cases, the people don’t even work, they just pretend to work and collect the small amount of money that they are paid for the month’s work. Of course, this does nothing to encourage the productivity of common people who, again, are disillusioned.

There are no easy answers to any of what seem the obvious challenges of rebuilding infrastructure and architecture that is crumbling, creating an economic work system that distributes more fair pay to common people, and the housing and transportation systems that are also failing. It seems on the human, cultural side a huge gain for the country to have elevated the national eye on health care and education, which are now recognized through the world as systems that benefit the Cuban people.

That their biggest export to the world is medical doctors and that their arts, dancers, musicians, thinkers, teachers, and intellects in education and in forward contemporary aesthetic directions and development are paid by the state is telling.

My read in terms of the larger social-political-economic frame of at least Havana is that the older generation, those of age during the 1959 revolution, wanted their freedoms from Batista, their cultural liberty, and a new opportunity to rename them. There seems to have been a period where all the promises of the revolution were not all as the dream was supposed to be; there were challenges. During yet another period, named by Cubans the “special period” (1990s) with the fall of the Soviet Union, who had been a major supporter-partner of the Cuban government, there were helpful and innovative economic-cultural swings that invigorated

tourism and local privatization, of food services, *paladares* (private family restaurants), and other entrepreneurial workings among the people. But too, the taxes came as well as regulations and that choked for many the upward economic freedom many hoped would come. It seems this younger generation, beyond the disillusionment, wants a new generation's freedom, the new economic frontier, on-demand "stuff." Their access, it seems, to this market of globally presented stuff is seen on the Internet. They see it, they want it, the end. Yet with all I've read and heard and discussed with people about the broken system and the unproductivity of the government in terms of stable economy, transportation, adequate housing, and a supportive work environment, all of the negatives that destroy modern societies, it may be naïve and one sided, but there was no shortage of rich cultural capital—the arts, music, dance, rituals, customs, and the spirit of the people—in its capital city of Havana. That all seems unstoppable and unshakable.

And while I'm hearing hopeful themes, the 60-year-old Castro revolution is still in evolution, and that's not in historical terms a very long time. The slave trade ended in Cuba in 1886, late, and their even later 1959 revolution could represent a pattern, followed by a promise kept. But as one 45-year-old Cuban told me, "I am hopeful and I am suspicious. And yes, these things take time, but for me, it has taken too long in my lifetime."

I guess for me the troubling part is that too many of the political-cultural swings have all been based on relations with external outer national powers.

Cuba seems to have so much as a country. I hope its own forward position in the global world is cemented with its own strategies for interactions and positioning based on all it brings to that new global table.

My dear friend Allen Callahan, to whom I sent an update on some of the thinking, wrote back:

Bill,

Very pleased to receive your post. Trusting this reply finds you well.

Your reflections treat most of the important challenges facing contemporary Cuba. And you're spot on that relations with foreign powers has had an overwhelming impact on Cuban development. As a small island nation poised between superpowers locked in Cold War craziness, it's hard to see how it could have been otherwise.

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But in one area, at least, the Cubans have transcended global politics to blaze a trail in which they are the global leaders—a topic you didn't mention in your reflections: sustainability. The Cubans lead the world in the development of renewable energy; it's the fruit of their survival strategy coming out of the Special Period.

The Cubans raise their own food, make their own energy, and as a consequence have effectively shielded themselves from the ups and downs of global markets and created a virtually perfect ecological footprint. This is huge. Are any of your friends talking about this? What are artists saying about the climate crisis and Cuba's triumph over Big Oil?

The Cold War past is important, but even more important is the future that Cuba is making now. The Cubans are already living the way we all need to learn to live.

Looking forward to seeing you soon.

Peace & love, Allen C

Contemporary Cuban Fusion, Thursday Evening, Roberto Fonseca Live!

The Cubans in their progressive jazz as players ain't messing around. I've known of Irakere since I was a youth, but since the advent of the '80s and '90s global-Afro, pop, fusion, and hip-hop, the blends now with electronic music (i.e., turntables, computers, house pop), Cuban contemporary jazz has only gotten a generation "more better." It is not a stretch to say Cuban musicianship at this professional, artistic level is superior. Every time our musicians slide more toward popular current trends, we lose ground musically and culturally. Actually, I believe we are in an inevitably downward spiral that can only end in more bad music and nonmusic. The market forces are so powerful—maybe it doesn't actually stop talent, but it certainly blocks and stifles it. But being in Cuba and seeing so many young musicians appreciated for their music gives me hope to share that with other young musicians.

Their level of sophistication and the music-spiritual depth is awe inspiring. You can hear their knowledge of form, fluid expressivity, craft, and virtuosity that is natural and confident within them, comfortably. It is a clear connection here to bebop as a movement of progressive ideas among a younger generation. Being in *La Zorra y el Cuervo* is like being

in Minton's playhouse of the 1940s in some ways, because the international hipster music crowd comes here, and they sit and listen. In Cuba the local musicians have to self-produce, so the CDs may be available or not, but that's not what drives the identity of their art as in the States. These young musicians are here to play. This night I went to hear the Cuban gifted musician Roberto Fonseca.

The only way I can describe it is as world-global Afro Cuban progressive jazz. The La Zorra y el Cuervo is Cuba's leading jazz club. All the progressive young jazz musicians perform here. To give readers a sense of what the music was like—imagine ensemble, crowd-pleasing jamming, evidences of electronic orchestration that illustrate contemporary fusion, global, voice box, synth-sampled drums, African, vocoder, turntable, Afro-Spanish Cuban chants.

This night I met Roberto Fonseca, who was born in Cuba in 1975 and is a modern-day, Havana-Cuban jazz pianist. From an early age, Fonseca was surrounded by music: his father, a drummer; his mother, a professional singer; and two older brothers of great international musical prestige. Fonseca played piano at the age of 8, and by 14 was experimenting with fusing American jazz and traditional Cuban rhythms, and all this was evident at once in this night's sounding. Fonseca studied at Cuba's Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA), and here he obtained a master's degree in composition. This is Afro-Cuban music, jazz, classical music, and traditional Cuban music. Global, house, electronic, with hip-hop swing swag. Impeccable rhythmic duplicity, meaning coming from an Afrocentric, polyrhythmic, Black backbeat and accuracy. All there.

He is a modern Cuban composer and performer. He has had a long career already, and now at 37, he's fluent in world music traditions, worked with the Buena Vista Social Club, and mixes all that with classical influences, American R&B, soul, and contemporary hip-hop.

On this night, from the first tune, I was submerged and captivated by organ monastic, Gregorian chant, then samples of Mediterranean, woman chant, modal, Arab, slowly releasing into the performance texture, samples of Weather Report, each player steps into the sounds, bass, guitar, then two horns, almost like a New Orleans funeral march awaiting patiently the eruption of the groove that was forthcoming. Gong crash and rhythm section enters into a pocket and we were "in the serious groove." Then it sounds like Herbie Hancock, with Wayne Shorter, but with a

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Cuban rhythmic precision and virtuosity that bleeds effortlessly out of the keys. In the various works, you definitely hear familiar remembrances of more recent yet older Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Yellow Jackets. All driven by that impeccable technique in piano and residing in the fingers simultaneously, harmonic depth and rhythmic command, unparalleled among any group of contemporary musicians. There isn't a musician I have sent my Cuban examples to that wasn't floored to a sweat. All my messages and texts were, "The Cubans kick all butts." It's a contemporary virtuosity that defies definition because it easily mingles, is woven from Cuban cultural roots, and directly centers on the best of our modern player traditions, like bebop and a McCoy, Herbie, Chick Corea virtuosity. And you can hear the conservatory discipline in the technique.

Roberto Fonseca's playing is hot; he sizzles but simmers first and then keeps burning, always so deep in the groove.

Fonseca is a younger Cuban brand. It's more global urban and not exactly D'Angelo hip-hop, but definitely more cosmopolitan urban and tied rhythmically to hip-hop and global house traditions deeply.

I was stolen into this and could not escape it. You could have left me chained there for a month and I would not have noticed, I was so removed into this space. But that's what great music does—it captures and secures you.

Fonseca enters too in this sound texture, with male chants, almost an old lyrical African chant as he sings. When meeting him, I simply said, "*Gracias, mi hermano. Muchos gracias.*" Thank you, my brother. I will see you again. I was so moved by your work, thank you."

Day 5—February 22, 2013

Las Terrazas, in the Sierra del Rosario mountains, is a village, 52 kilometers (near two hours) outside of the city of Havana. It is interesting for two main reasons: one, it is a sustainable development community, the country's first, serving families that had been peasant communities since the '60s, and second, it was the home of an estimated 100–120 African families who were living there during the slave trade. This was a coffee plantation, and the remains of those slave barracks for me was a powerful window into the African diasporic narrative that speaks directly to Cuba's past, present, and future. The always missing link in the narrative of the

diaspora is the degree to which slave life was a retention of African culture, how much of the expression was then retained or transmitted into materials of cultural codes, ritual, belief systems, music, and in the case of Cuba, the degree to which the African traditions define national identity. The music connection we have made here. But the missing link for me always is the insufficient information, an acknowledgment of the tragedy, or the results of this huge human drama, still playing out totally. You can't do Cuban music without dealing with the social-economic condition, and you can't do the social-economic condition without dealing with slave culture. And so the move from that is what defines "awakening, moderation, liberty" in the modern world.

Like my trip to Senegal, West Africa, to the island of Gorée, to see the slave-holding houses, the "door of no return" that looks outward over the ocean, the slave barracks of the Sierra del Rosario mountains for me was an even more stark reality and reminder of the devastation and the decimation of life, and yet an indication of the power of Africans to survive in new worlds. This critical dance between Spanish, African, and new world sharing is evident in every syncretic society, island, and nation. So my questions were answered in one important way, which was: Africans lived in Cuba producing the sugar, beans, coffee, wood, and lumber harvesting, and all that cultural mix produced so much of the 18th, 19th, 20th, and 21st global capital that we know as modern Cuba.

Interlude 2—Cuban Music Collaboration

Yet another follow-up was spending time with young Cuban rapper-hip-hop-producer, Edgardo González on February 22, 2013, 6:33 p.m. to 1 a.m. This evening in particular, we spent a second evening recording and collaborating on a recording project. There were plenty of e-mails, in between our first meeting in November 2012 and now. In those first sessions he shared:

That's what I want to do with my music, with the hip-hop language. It's like composing music. You have to think outside the box. It doesn't have to follow the same line that you have a speech, rap, that talks about just the issues that hip-hop talks about. You have to mix it up. And that is the thing, when you're young; you have to be exposed to a lot of music. I think music is one language it doesn't matter. If you happen to be closer

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to hip-hop, that just means a lot of the music you use comes from that, but if you use Afro-Cuba, Brazilian, funk, you are going to put that into it. If you read poetry, read film, you can put those kinds of emotions and translate that experience into music.

On this second trip I had stopped in to visit a critical player in the recent emergence of hip-hop connecting from Cuba to Miami, Beth Boone, director of the Miami Light Project. Winwood, this Miami neighborhood, is a “new birthed hot arts space,” with coffee shops, warehouses converted into garment stores, merchandise, and arts spaces. According to Beth,

We are a cultural organization that focuses on emerging artists, forms, contemporary culture as it manifests in dance music and theater, multimedia pioneering cultural exchange from Cuba. We received grants from among others, the Ford Foundation, who labeled hip-hop “Future Aesthetics.”

This was a way of looking for a better description, a label of these art styles. They picked the word to diffuse the negativity of hip-hop imagery. We asked the question, “How can we bring to the stage the freshest representation of contemporary culture?”

Enter Yrak and Edgaro. By 2002, Havana had had hip-hop and a festival that for 10 years was “the most important hip-hop festival” in the world. It converged in Havana, in the summer of 1995. It was all about the word: “The word was revolution, self-actualization.” Mainstream hip-hop had already become dominant, vapid, which is what happens in this country when the commercial forces take over. People think crap sells. But in Alamar, Havana, a cradle of hip-hop, birth happened. It sits at a higher elevation than the rest of the city, and so in the '90s people put aluminum foil on their antennas, and caught broadcasts from Miami, 92.5 FM. The radio jargon was captured, and that's how hip-hop entered Havana. So, here's this flaw in the government's control of ideas and information, and suddenly, hip-hop breaks through. This is 1990 on, during the “Special Period” in Cuba.

So what do hard times do? It makes people poets. The hip-hop beats, music is entering Cuba. They didn't at first always know exactly what the people are rhyming about, but the hip-hop culture starts to permeate the youth culture there. Rap takes a foothold. But it's the kind of orality of speaking at great speed, and at a time too when people had something

to say, and as well it's this cultural thing, and hip-hop is born in Cuba. Yrak becomes the pioneering rapper in Cuba, and his second in command, a younger prodigy, Edgardo, the front for the group. It becomes Doble Filo, which means the double edge. Miami Light helped finance the group's early CD and film projects.

Back to Havana, at Edgardo's Home Studio

In our prework sessions with Denis Peralta, he joined to play keyboard this time. Edgardo, Denis, and I started into the areas of process that define us and challenge us. These differences of approach and aesthetics for artists are huge, like territories of great technical, spiritual, and philosophical divides that dictate directions many times. But this is the art challenge, and the battle is long and fiercely fought and territories protected. We had the tapes rolling for these conversations:

Edgardo: I know this is a whole new way of coming at this, the way you all think about music, because you both, like, study music. I come from the tradition of sampling, which is deep in the roots of hip-hop culture. The MC DJs, they sample the drum break of a song, and made it longer so people could rap over it. So that's the way I look at music from sampling. Whatever you lay down, you say, "Oh that's just a piano," but I can work wonders from whatever, because I'm used to taking things from an old dusty vinyl, with a lot of noise on it and twenty instruments. So I have to figure out what note is this, what note is that, and then compose something out of it. And different layers of things. So I come in from a different perspective in music. So whatever you put down, four months from now, I can flip it into something that's a "whole new thing."

Bill: Well, this is a difficult position from traditional musicians. This, in my mind, for decades in discussion with contemporary younger musicians, is where technology has created forward and yet deep cuts into the thinking about the value of music making and production.

Edgardo: It's interesting that in hip-hop conception we compose the whole from the different parts first, we flip it around. Fifty years from now, the way I think will be the established way. You can't stop that.

Bill: Well, that's a whole other approach. The way I'm looking at it is mixing all of that together as music production. I'm thinking about the

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song structure that we come in with. I'm thinking about Denis playing those, and I'm playing these chords, we have to do the instrumental parts of this, both the bass lines, the harmonies, the song forms. Then that's all laid down with the beat production patterns that you are creating. I think from that we layer that up from there, so melodies, the voice loop, the singers will sing it. So, I will lay in the instrumentation, horns, strings, whatever, I think that's the way we can layer it. The interesting thing for me is that you all hear things, in segments. We hear the work as a whole. It's a different way. You are not just slicing tape, but you are constructing sound segments which become a production. That's just different.

Edgaro: What the kids hear today around the world is, they need some sample, and they are looking for music. We want them to listen to something that's says to them, "That's me." And what that is, is contemporary hip-hop production. They need samples cut in. It's specific codes. Like what Robert Fonseca is doing. He was one of the first with samples, the music, and playing. One of the first artists to do this for me. It's easier for the new generations to hear, that brings them in. We need people to be like, "We understand this."

Bill: Yeah, the only thing that is connecting is what is relevant. I don't think it diminishes the artists at all to be in touch with the people, which is what we all have been talking about. That relational moment allows you to bring something new to them pulls them along, your way. But too, you get to as an artist be pulled a little along that way, the people's way, what the people are dealing with, with the impulses of the people, and with that you have to have a balance.

Denis: No, it's like you are speaking another language. You are speaking something they understand and are attracted to, and it gives attention to something that is not normally shared, in their own world.

Edgaro: So the kids now with all this have something they can relate to. It's not abstract for them. Fonseca's label said, "Hey, we know you are great and all that, but that's not enough man."

Bill: Well, some of us are trying to slow that down a bit, but you are right, . . . we can't ignore it. That's why collaboration like this allows us to deal with it.

Denis: It grows you up.

Day 6—Saturday

For me, the crowned day of real exchange and share was my composition lesson with composer Denis Peralta at his home. Denis picked me up in a Cuban “line cab” and we, with his wife and kid, headed to his home in a residential Cuban neighborhood, “off line” where Denis grew up. He pointed out the ballparks he played in, the specific coconut and mango trees he used to steal from as a kid, his bicycle routes. I mean, this was real Havana, where the neighbors are not the workers or the tourists.

Greeting us were both his mothers, his real mom and his godmother. This is the home of his godmother and where he keeps his piano. His mother is a medical doctor, and his godmom an English teacher, both in their eighties, and delightful.

Denis and his wife and kid live in three residences: this one, Denis’s other mom, his mother-in-law, and with his real mom.

We went into a back room of the small two-bedroom apartment and there was his grand piano, and bookshelves filled neatly with piles of scores everywhere, and a bed and phone.

Denis and his mothers had promised a meal so our time was measured, focused, and to the point.

Denis, of all the things he has done as a creator, writing and directing plays, composing ballets, and his compositions and performances and travels abroad, was now interested in writing opera. He had recently been commissioned to do an opera and didn’t know where to start. What was the role of singers, the orchestration? What was the process? How to move from libretto to story to lyric to characters?

We sat at the piano, and I was able to address opera conception, suggest orchestration for chamber size; we talked of vocal ranges, and the psychological emotive motor as the reigning element that drives opera as distinct from musical theater.

This was great. Then we ate with the whole family.

We had a special Cuban spiced redfish, beans, and special Cuban tomatoes, rice, and coleslaw, lemon Cuban soda, and Cuban local crackers sold from the street vendor who yelled to us upstairs from the street. The crackers were delivered by pulling them up from a basket attached to a rope that was let out of the window. That’s how the shopping and cash transactions were done. This meal was real.

Just a Note on This, before I Leave the Country

And just as we were leaving, 10 U.S. senators were there, the next day in our hotel, and three Obama cabinet members were there. The day before, we had heard Raúl Castro was announcing retirement. In yesterday's paper as well, it was announced Russia had suspended a previous \$2 billion debt to Cuba, and in exchange they could have Russian airlines in Cuba.

Within a week after we returned, Hugo Chávez, Venezuela's president and Cuba's biggest ally in the ALBA (Latin American countries offering alternatives to U.S. influence in the region, made up of Cuba, Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and countries in the Caribbean) died. All signal shifts in history. The transformation is in progress.

Some things now will be helpful, many things will be poison: drugs, guns, and certainly Starbucks and McDonald's, which will surely set Cuban health care back 50 years! As my Swiss friend said to me, "Yes, we don't want these things in our culture, but the kids want the hamburgers."

Day 7—Sunday

My last day in Havana was spent walking along the Malecón, after conversations with my friend, Denis Peralta. I filmed, as I did before, what I call the great Cuban Wall, like the Great Wall of China, and contemplated what I had learned this time. The overarching art-word term that sustains in my mind is *interdisciplinary mix*. By that, I mean—in terms of my two visits so far—the cultural conventions, the way I heard and saw the music, the songs of the people, the art and the architecture, the dance, the movements of the people, the strokes of the painters, the zoom of the Cuban cabs, the dance of the people, the rhythms of the music, the elegance of the architecture, the proud spirit of the people, the resilience, the urbane, the modern swag of disenchanted and/or energized urban young people—and so, if there were a dance, a picture, a composition, you'd have to write it from all those angles to capture what Cuba means today, culturally.

I did not intend to figure out the complex relationships and definitions of modern-day Cuba within an evolving socialist state, within an even faster generational cultural swing through technology and media penetrations, or read between the lines of nationalist rhetoric, pride, suspicion, innovation, or the profundity of poverty as modern buildings stand erect against decaying streets and 50-year-old fixed line *bottero* cabs

that seem to hold together with only the rumble and shake of their bumpy and noisy rattles. I noticed something; I never saw or felt angry people. I don't remember one angry disposition, only dealing with their positions. I know Cuba is nowhere near perfect, not all pretty, not all positive, nor all for the people.

I remember two propaganda signs: "Todas por la revolución" and "Socialismo o Muerto," meaning "All for the Revolution" and "Socialism or Death." Yet despite the truth of a rough history, you don't get death handed to you as punishment for your dissent—silenced maybe, but this revolution was relatively benign, in comparison to other global revolutions, including our own in the States. It is a nonviolent, nonhostile revolution of the past, at least as it stands now. And to the question, how will Cuba stand now in 2015 forward?

My feeling is that Cuba has, even more so now, a lot to share with the world that has not been "overcommercialized" and drained for commercial profit, although the expressions are not virgin. The politics and distance posturing will inevitably soon soften and fall away, simply because the world is still moving, and Cuba is in the moving world.

My concerns are not political, they are cultural and educational, and I was interested from day one in what the artistic minds and cultural voices were saying today in the world. I'm sure it is continually rich, and I don't want this richness to be compromised by the conveniences of the modern market. So my aim continues to be the conversations and collaborations that allow artists to infuse each other with what "language" composer Denis Peralta insists is universal among us. Cuban identity and its human art, despite capital crawls, will no doubt stay its powerful voice that neither dismantles its own historic cultural housing nor compromises its uniqueness in sharing. But all this, I feel, increases the way we can see more deeply into Cuban experiences. In this case, because my Cuban friends too supped, they heard my song.

For me, cultural relevancy is cultural human frequency—that is, the meaning of the voices as sounding when the ringing is focused on hearing the many ring together. That's harmony, that's colors that blend, that's bodies that dance together and poetry when separate lines converge into meaning. That's what a beat is—it's constant propulsion in time with a logical sequence of patterns of sounds. But people receive all the residue of these exchanges and smile deeply within because they took it in, they

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contributed to this sounding out, and it made their experiencing of it relevant. The degree to which people consciously reached understanding of their spaces, in meanings and experience, and in benefit in time, and that they are good with this—this is what was added to me, this share in Cuba.

Music Coda: May 12, 2013

The following is a recoding, a follow-up in Boston. Tapes rolled for a recording session with Edgardo and Yrak, now in Boston.

Bill: Today we have two sets of productions. We have the things Edgardo and I did in Cuba earlier this year, and we have the things myself, Rhan Dorsey, my producer, did here in Boston. This is collaboration, we are meshing them both. We don't have a plan, except that we were going to come here today and make a new plan. And so the music is the result of that discussion. The idea is to mesh these together for a new, global vision for what the contemporary artists or hip-hop artists are doing today, combining these things in ways we have not seen before. Part of that, I think, is an international discussion about how we are cross-sectioning ideas, and how those ideas have meaning outside of the borders of the U.S. or Cuba. This is a global thing, a new "we" thing we hoped that we were creating, a new collaboration. This is something musicians do all the time. But the idea here is that every time it's new and fresh, it's a new and fresh way. And we want to honor that. The idea was a new verse from Yrak and Edgardo. So where do we start . . . ?

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THE “I” THEORY

Stars entertain us. Icons do something much more. They embody us. They tell us something about who we are and who we want to be. They are both a mirror and a shaping force. Zeitgeist is German for the spirit of the times, the general cultural, intellectual, and political climate within a nation, or a specific group, in a particular period. You could call it the collective consciousness of a given people at a certain time. Icons can see and feel the Zeitgeist of their generation more clearly than the rest of us. They have the antennae, the sensitivity, and the intellect to become a thermometer of their era, and they have the talent to reflect the Zeitgeist through their art.

—“I Would Die 4 U: Why Prince Became an Icon,” Touré, 2013

The “I” Theory: The Examination Thesis

I have been critical recently of mainstream popular artistry. I always knew it was industry driven, and I blamed record producers and advertisement writers for slipping everything downward on the slope of self-serving, greed-saturated selfishness. This is so prevalent in our popular music expressions. But I always listen out for what young artists say too, because I’m interested in the correlations, how they were tapped and zapped into this.

I do blame the oversaturation of “Donald Trump media-type culture,” such as *The Apprentice*, *Survivor*, *American Idol*, and other similar TV shows for driving and defining our current pop American pastimes.

But no matter what one feels, these ideas represent a kind of take on cultural relevance, what actually happens in our times and what counts to people. Young popular artists have a stake in what this means, no matter what. As the Touré quote points out, artistry is critical in defining our

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ages. It has always been an elevated feature of expressive dynamic in our society. So what happens when this impulse begins to pulsate differently?

Sociologist Franz Fanon wonderfully stated that “Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, define its mission, fulfill it, or betray it.” At the core of this exploration of music ideas is: What do the people believe and live for? Art follows that impulse, always. The tools and languages (Internet, Google, Twitter) that we use to construct our expressions of reality have shifted, that’s real. I believe we should always check our heartbeats and breathing rate, our reality, our worldview projected around us. I like to track this “culture life beat” through one of my favorite studies, popular culture magazines. I love them. They’re one of my scholarship/research hobbies. Why magazines? Magazines represent a real investment to produce a “picture of what attracts people in culture,” and it is a window into what everyday people are invested in. It is a mirror, but there are beautiful things here too. I’m a fan of popular culture, but not without limits. These young artists in this particular survey have management, record companies, and publicists. So their views—at least as expressed in these particular moments of magazine sampling (*Jazziz*, *GQ*, *The Source*, *Rolling Stone*, *Elle*, *Vibe*, *Esquire*, *Essence*) during 2007–2013—represent again a view into kinds of thinking about creativity and meaning in popular culture.

In other words, these folks are having a conscious conversation publicly about what they dream for, work toward, see, create, produce, and represent.

These are contemporary music and culture impulses. I’m not interested here in these as bio pieces or features or passing judgment, although I have some ideas about these to share too. There is enough online information on artists’ lives, as well as images, YouTube performances, and such. I’m interested here in printed magazine interviews available to the buying public.

I’m intrigued by the idea of “I created me and sold me to the waiting marketplace” as a modern mantra, and how that has become—not the only—but a driving force of what artists say they are doing with their artistry today. I call this the “I” theory of popular artistry. That is, how today, in the 2015+ period, people think they invented their own artistic identity as a “brand.” They have the idea that somehow they, on their own, have an elevated sense of themselves as artists simply because they got recognized or famous or sold a lot of something, or 5,000 people saw them and pushed “thumbs up” on a button in the convenience of their home or cell phone

app. As I have seen studying popular culture artistry, it took many years to define itself and it is never done while looking in the rearview mirror to see who is calling it unique. Today’s mega-artists don’t just have an electronic fan base—their public buys their cologne, clothes, drinks, shirts, and music. Most of these artists are hugely gifted and command respect because of their gifts and focused work. But for me, in this larger set of essays, the focus again is on other contexts and conceptual frames, and the work is brought through those frames. I feel these must be considered.

Let me say from the onset here, young artists of every era are supposed to be “doing it, bringing it, their way.”

Our question here is: Why have our standards for art been so strangled by mostly market forces? The “I-ism,” which emanates and is espoused by too many popular artists today, did not begin with the music; it came from a poisoned commerciality and greed in our larger culture. But how do we take the music back for the people and to the cultures?

Artistry in today’s popular marketplace is merchandised music paired with media entertainment. What bothers me in particular is that the music business is too crowded with all this stuff, and pseudo musicians, entertainers, “wanna be famous” kids, and one-hit media moments who are not seeking the art—they are chasing cash and attention.

This “merchant music media madness” sucks up all the air left in the room, so real music and musicians get suffocated. Or in the case of every one of these fascinating young artists—Janelle Monae, Bruno Mars, Katy Perry, Common, Esperanza Spalding, Rihanna, Wiz Khalifa, Norah Jones, Miguel, Lamar Kendrick, Justin Timberlake—the qualifiers, the criteria of what is deemed “musical,” have shifted so that celebra-dom, or being sexy, or being controversial, or outselling the other, drives or affects them. This gets in the way of artistry and in my opinion causes the crashes. Can we just get back to the music?

Songs as Sincere Indicators

“Tonight we are young, so let’s set the world on fire. We can burn brighter than the sun. . . . The moon is on my side. . . . We are young. So let’s set the world on fire. We can burn brighter than the sun.”

This was the 2013 best song of the year. Really?! Although some might find today’s singing is almost as bad as Bob Dylan’s, the difference

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is at least Dylan had something to say with a bad voice. Times are truly changing! I think it's nice that a song boasts, "The moon is on my side," I'm just concerned that there is way too much green cheese in these moons today that are burning bright with overloaded "me on my moon tripping." I do hold young songwriters accountable for not inspiring deeper reflection in our mainstream popular culture today.

Alicia Keys's song/video "Girl on Fire," says: "She's on top of the world. Hottest of the hottest girls say. Oh, we got our feet on the ground. And we're burning it down. Oh, got our head in the clouds, And we're not coming down. This girl is on fire." While on the surface this may appear to be just another celebration of self-made-ness, the music video shows a "hardworking girl-mom," and in the face of this, it shows generational love and a strong family that sticks together through the fire. Hats off to her and other mainstream artists for showing a deeper picture amidst a mostly empty field of pop narratives. Over the decades, there have certainly been hundreds of songs by forthright young singers who created youth anthems and asserted this was "our time, our goal, our night." "We are the champions, I will survive." The list is long. Art, great song, is unique and worthy in its sounding; it doesn't need a "branding bonus" to be of note. Artistry is gift, not gimmick.

Yet today every young artist who comes along and parades the covers of somebody's magazine touting, "Look at me now, I had a family trauma and so I wrote a song about it and somebody liked it, said I was talented, and now I'm famous, wow, aren't I unique?" What bothers me about this tendency of musicians to be creating "noise" about their images and not music is how everything is "all good in the hood" these days, everything is fair game, and we fake so much because we are running over with way too much "celeb love," and everybody wants attention. You can today simply create and brand yourself with your own titles and make up fantasies about you doing something that is unique.

Artists "brand" their generations differently, we get that.

Has Music Lost Its Powers?

Today's mainstream popular music, the most powerful expressive force around us, has lost its purpose, step, and ability to forge a meaningful expression to represent ideas and images of substance in modern culture.

I believe it is because the ideas in music have been entirely supplanted by mostly commercial constructs for profit drives, and not musical or cultural or ideological motives. Musicians need to speak up about their art, and so for me, that is a shame worth fighting to change!

One of the essential components of music and music/art making is community and being in connection. If we are concerned about the quality and presentation of art, then we must equally be concerned with the quality and condition of the people. These two concerns are inseparable.

I listened thoroughly to the most anticipated popular music production in 2013, *The 20/20 Experience* by Justin Timberlake, produced by Timberland. I was taken at first by the musicality, the emphasis on strong R&B traditional forms, the musical, rhythmic, and production tropes, sequences, and performance traditions. It's a far better pop project than most. It was team-project produced. Every song has five songwriters, reminiscent of Q's MJ projects of the '80s. The record even has strings, horns harking back to the best of '70s, '80s, and '90s. The live band he did his TV appearances with was "killing it." What I'm feeling empty about, however, is its lack of substance in lyrical and poetic choices, ideas, and its ceiling mentality to play only to an adolescent, mainstream crowd.

The vision of production artistry is limited to pop youth, and it's totally self-serving, "look at me." There are virtually no pieces that raise any issues that touch that generation other than party life or puffed-up love narratives. In a time when people have real needs, there is no sense of the mattering of the music to address our "needing lived condition." And so the measure of success is still only popularity-show-based criteria and little in the way of forward-ness of the music. There is little innovation and it's all revolving around, "me, myself, and I." It's all about obtaining and maintaining market presence.

My cousin Chuck served as musical director for Justin, Rihanna, John Mayer, and at the time we spoke in June 2013, *X Factor* music show host Demi Lovato.

"What's going on with the industry?" I asked him.

He answered, "It's a music hustle game. It's all about who you know and how the politics line up. Who's on your label, who's the publisher, which producer wrote this song for your camp. It's not about the music. The whole industry is asking itself how can I protect what I have because

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everything is going away. All deals are made on what affiliation can you have with Pepsi [Beyoncé], or this company, or that, and then it's not about the music but how you connect to the marketing of that."

How could Mariah Carey, then Christina Aguilera, and even Anita Baker a decade before them, all have mainstream music that was melodically and "harmonically musical" and in less than 20 years, we have such a decline in artistic interest in "real music" in mainstream popular music culture that is not substantive musically? Jill Scott, Erykah Badu, and the whole pack of "gone way too quickly" neo-soul movement with Musiq Soulchild, Maxwell, and D'Angelo also represented the best that was supposed to keep coming. I don't think there is less talent. I don't think the masses can't hear this. I think the wrong people are at the table, and they drive the industry and make the bad decisions. It's all a game of dollars and greed, which again is a disastrous formula for art.

The media of communication available to a culture are a dominant influence on the formation of the culture's intellectual and social preoccupations. . . . And our languages are our media. Our media are our metaphors. Our metaphors create the content of our culture.

Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*

What They Said, 2007–2013

Here are 10 or so magazine artists' interviews that I have been drawn to over the years because they presented the ideas of contemporary popular music musicians. These struck me as coming from the artists. In these views, I got a sense of what was important at that moment to each, and this collection represents a sampling, in no particular order, of impulses that, taken together, can be read as a lens through which to understand popular artistry today.

- "Coming of Age, Esperanza Spalding (23-Year-Old Phenomenon)," August 2008, *Jazziz Magazine*
- "Rihanna Rocks Our World," January 2010, *GQ Magazine*
- "Rihanna Is the Sexiest Woman Alive," November 2011, *Esquire*
- "Sex, God & Katy Perry," 2010, *Rolling Stone*

- “Wiz Khalifa, Taylor Gang,” *Sours Magazine* No. 252
- “Norah Jones, the Anti-Diva,” March 2007, *Paste Magazine*
- “Common, a Common Purpose,” March 2007, *Paste Magazine*
- “Nicki Minaj,” April 2013, *Unzipped*
- “Bruno Mars (Pop’s Golden Child),” May 2013, *Rolling Stone*
- “Janelle Monae (I Made a Decision to Be Unique),” May 2013, *Essence*
- “Miguel, Kendrick Lamar, Leaders of the New Cool School,” May 2013, *Vibe Magazine*

Katy Perry (b. 1984, Santa Barbara, California), *Rolling Stone*, August 19, 2010

I had my students read the 2010 *Rolling Stone* article “Sex, God & Katy Perry.” On the cover, she’s half dressed as expected and with a crucifix. The thing they found amusing was the ease with which she, or her parents, or her team, dealt with their own all-over-the-place contradictions, conflicts, or confusion. So, as the text unaltered shows, this is “a way,” a voice in our times, a PK (preacher’s kid) transformed into a pop star in our modern era.

The other day, Katy Perry was Googling herself again. “Any artist who says they don’t Google their name is a big fat liar,” she says. Perry is shrewd about her online image, with 3,062,173 followers on Twitter. . . . She was on her laptop—when she noticed a bunch of online gossip sites were reporting that she had called Miley Cyrus’ new look “Britney Spears all over again” at the MuchMusic Awards in Toronto. . . . She quickly tweeted a response: “I never said shit about my girl Miley. I love that ho.” . . . That was exactly the kind of moment that Perry lives for.

“OK, ‘California Gurls’ is not genius,” admits Perry. “It’s not my opus. But it’s catchy as fuck, and it’s a great summertime song.” . . .

“A lot of religions use meditation or chanting as a subliminal prayer language, and speaking in tongues isn’t that different—it’s a secret, direct prayer language to God. If I felt intuitively that I had to pray for some situation, but I didn’t rationally understand it, I just let my spirit

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pray for it. Once I stopped being chaperoned, and realized I had a choice in life, I was like, 'Wow, there are a lot of choices.' I began to become a sponge for all that I had missed—the music, the movies. I was as curious as the cat.”

“God is very much still a part of my life,” she says. “But the way the details are told in the Bible—that’s very fuzzy for me. And I want to throw up when I say that. But that’s the truth.”

“I still believe that Jesus is the son of God,” says Perry. “But I also believe in extraterrestrials, and that there are people who are sent from God to be messengers, and all sorts of crazy stuff.” She sighs. “I look up into the sky and I’m just mindfucked—all those stars and planets, the never-endingness of the universe. I just can’t believe that we’re the only polluting population. Every time I look up, I know that I’m nothing and there’s something way beyond me. I don’t think it’s as simple as heaven and hell.”

Janelle Monae (b. December 1, 1988), “Adventure in Wonda Land,”
Essence Magazine, May 2013

Janelle Monae struck us all with that tightrope video. Like with the arrival of D’Angelo, Black music could claim yet again the magic had not gone out of the musical DNA of our culture. We were wowed and glad.

And then comes the fame, with the added pressure that you have now done something new again.

“Can you do that new thing again?”

“I believe in being a timeless artist, and at the same time it’s about transcending it, not worrying about rushing things or moving a certain way because of time. I made a decision to be unique and now it’s a part of my DNA. My fashion is like a magic trick, the first act is the Black, and the second act is the white. And the third act, the prestige, is the pop of color, on my nail, only lips.” Her hairdo, she call the “Monae,” she says. “It’s top secret. When I’m on stage I make sure it’s moisturized and sitting like a nice plant getting fertilization.”

“People don’t ask Jay-Z to take his shirt off when he rhymes! I like skirts and dresses just like everyone else, but I had a message I needed to put out there. It was up to me to show people and young girls there was another way. I believe in divine order. Being in the right place, at the right time, in the right spirit.”

“Metropolis and Arch Android (her recordings) were about the realization that I have these unique qualities that only I can bring out and use. Electric Lady is more personal, more revealing, and it will be more about self-actualization Now I’ve become more fearless. I’ve become more unafraid to mess up. As long as I’m honest, giving my all and not allowing anything prior or after to fill up my mental space, then I’m good.”

Bruno Mars (b. October 8, 1985, in Honolulu), “The Golden Child,”
Rolling Stone, May 19, 2013

Britney Spears, Justin Timberlake, Beyoncé, are all child performers out doing their thing on the stump, on the road trained and supported by parents. Sammy Davis Jr. was always our great example, “Black Mozartian” like stories of a young performing prodigy, or Sugar Chile Robinson, dazzled audiences as a child. And of course there is MJ, Michael Jackson.

Bruno Mars for me was the new arrival, the way it was supposed to be. Musicians being again prominently seen doing their thing as musicians, not industry or market masquerades. He does not disappoint. At the piano, at the guitar, at the jam session, in the club, on stage, TV, and as a songwriter, dancer, real-singer, a real musician.

“I’m not a fan of self-indulgence. For me music is, ‘I want to feel good’ or ‘I want to dance,’ as opposed to me singing about my growing up in Hawaii and my struggle to relate. But I want to keep writing songs, man. There is a feeling you get from writing a good song that you don’t get from anything else. You forever want that feeling, the same way you forever want to eat good food, you forever want to be in love. It’s been with me for so long it’s always been, ‘All right see you later, I’m gonna go do the show.’”

Robyn Rihanna Fenty (b. 1988): “Rihanna Rocks Our World,”
GQ Magazine, January 2010, and “Rihanna Is the Sexiest Woman Alive,”
Esquire, November 2011

The Rihanna story interviews were the most classic and disturbing for me. The pieces were entirely about her sexuality and can be read as the obsession of men to obtain, control, and exploit a “brown exotic.” Yet allowing the story to speak for itself, these things were exactly what

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the publicist pushed for, what the management allowed, what she said, and what the magazine sold. When the *GQ* article and cover came out, I was invited to speak at Spelman College (an all-women's school in Atlanta—my grandmother was a professor there in the early 1900s) to a class examining gender and identity in popular culture. We discussed the article and image. (Rihanna is topless, placing her arms over her still-exposed breasts.)

The near 70 young Black college women I spoke with were split. Rihanna should be ashamed of herself, or Rihanna is “gender empowered,” because she can do what men always do, choose to be herself by herself.

I'm no prude; the cover shot is very lovely. But that's the point, isn't it? On the shoot, L. A. Reid, the label executive, upon seeing her was heard to say, “Rihanna, put some f@@@ clothes on!” The *Esquire* writer begins his essay; “She comes onto stage in a cage. She wears a shiny blue raincoat, a jewel encrusted bikini peeking out of it. Tall platform heels, her curly red wig bounces as she skips out of the cage and intimately into our lives. We are not properly introduced, yet her hands are everywhere. She grabs her own radiant ass, she handles it, offers it like it's a romp roast. Caresses her breasts Also she sings.”

“I've put everything I've wanted to say for the past eight months into my music.”

At this point, the new record was titled *Rated R*. One song is called “G4L”(Gangsta for Life), whereas the article states it is “a revenge fantasy with her homegirls arming themselves with guns to go out and fuck somebody up on another track, she talks about getting her hair pulled out during sex. She's made her point.”

When asked, in the *GQ* article, “What do you want to put out there that you haven't gotten a chance to talk about?” Rihanna stated, “They [the public, us] just don't understand me. I just think people straight up don't know who I am; they just know what I look like, they know the idea of me. But, they'll learn more this time, because now I let my guard down, and I'm more comfortable just being myself. That's exactly what I want to be. And even on the album, you definitely get a glimpse of my personality.”

From the *Esquire* interview, she said, “At the end of a concert, I don't feel like I've been this sexy thing. Really, I don't even think about it. Unless it's a song that really calls for it, like ‘Skin’ or ‘S&M,’ or when I cover

'Darling Nikki.' There's a section that's called 'Sex' in the show, which is the obvious section for sexuality."

She explains to the writer, "I'm always representing Barbados. All over the world no matter what I was doing, no matter what I achieved, no matter what award it was, I always shouted them out. So I started making them feel like, 'This is our girl.'"

The article points out that Rihanna is the most famous person in the history of her country. In her hometown doing a concert in the National Cricket Stadium, she performs as a part of her duties as Barbados's tourism ambassador.

Although the girls are dressed conservatively, the article mentions that back in the United States, 19-year-old girls wear ripped T-shirts with Rihanna lyrics: "I may be bad, but I'm perfectly good at it. Chain and Whips excite me." As she had given a shout-out on stage in New York to her mom and grandmother, she says to the interviewer, "I like to say, I'm a bad bitch, but they are badder bitches than me."

Nicki Minaj (b. 1984): "That's Genius," *Elle Magazine*

"World domination—in terms of creating an empire—that is absolutely my goal."

Nicki Minaj burst upon us surprising but something we had been prepared for. There was Cindy Lauper, and Tina Turner, and there was Madonna, and there was Missy and Gaga. But cartoonish, bold, beautiful, smart, extremely attractive, as in model, and rapping with as much attitude and fire as a Tupac, she raised eyes and temperatures in all kinds of directions. "I'm like a drag-queen. I like transforming. That's my whole thing, and it feels good. I do it for the art." The *New York Times* called Nicki Minaj "the most influential female rapper of all time."

A lucrative Pepsi deal, TV host-judge on *American Idol*, it was reported recently she is earning 12 million, and named the 8th-highest-paid annual cash king/queen on Forbes among hip-hop moguls.

"My lawyer gives the same speech to everyone who wants to do business with me now." Nicki is not one of those artists who allow her representatives to make decisions for her. "I'm on conference calls all day with lawyers, accountants and executives—people of power—and they treat me with respect.

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“Because I command respect. I’m not cocky, but I deserve to know what’s going on. It’s my brand and my life. That’s my advice to women in general: even if you’re doing a nine to five job, treat yourself like a boss. Not arrogant, but be sure of what you want—and don’t allow people to run anything for you without your knowledge. You want everyone to know, ‘Okay, I can’t play games with her. I have to do right by this woman.’ That’s what it’s all about. I’ve seen so many mistakes made by artists who weren’t paying attention—and that can derail a career. I love the creative side, but if I don’t focus on the business side, then I have this fear I’m gonna be an old lady one day and feel like: What did I even do? I can build an empire.

I want to be known as the queen of hip-hop who opened doors in every other area of entertainment for other women so they never feel boxed in ever again when I’m done.”

Norah Jones (b. 1979): “The Anti-Diva,” *Paste Magazine*, March 2007

Her name is Geehali Norah Jones Shankar. We came to know her as Norah Jones, and she was a musically awaited storm. Talented, completely recognizable voice and style. The music was wonderful—she sat at the piano, like the old days, singing her songs, and really playing. We musicians knew she was the daughter of famed Indian musician Ravi Shankar.

At 18, she was a student at the University of North Texas, Denton, where she formed a central core of musicians around her, which eventually became her collaborators and band members. From there, she moves to New York, gigging in restaurants, waiting tables, and writing songs with her colleagues. “That’s where I learned to play and sing at the same time. The best way to do it is to get it at a gig where no one’s listening and just do it. This is what I love and I’m lucky that I get to do what I love and make a living. Not many people get that. I love it. I always play music, and I always will. My career could go down the toilet and I will still have a very satisfying musical life.” Her record contract on Blue Note came from her demos, word of mouth, and her club performances.

Her 2002 release, “Come Away with Me,” was a world smash and earned five Grammys that year. “Little Broken Hearts,” from 2012, was a complete fall to me, because she allowed the media and rock aesthetic from her newer remade image to prevail, and while that would have been cool, the music, the “Nora Jones” sound and presence, was dropped. I hope she comes back to us again, singing her songs, naturally in her way.

Common (b. 1972): "A Common Purpose," *Paste Magazine*,
March 2007

Common enters the world of music through the prism of hip-hop positive consciousness and the spoken word movement, which was high on its heels standing as a beacon of enlightenment in pop culture. So he comes out of this and understands the role, the roots, the reasons for making music, even if it's just a "commercial sales line" you buy into it. But that's OK. He springs on the musical scene collaborating with Kanye West in 1992 with "Can I Borrow a Dollar?" And at this interview point, he was expecting his 2007 release, "Finding Forever." But here again, there was space in the marketplace for politically apt, social conscious rapping. My, how times have changed!

"I feel like we all have a purpose in life, and through my music and art, I want people from all walks of life to become enlightened, and enjoy, and be entertained and encouraged." He tells the interview his purpose is to "craft, timeless music." He states, "You can hear a continuity, meaning, something progressive but with a certain boom-bap element." This record is about "how we can exist forever through this music if we just find this place where it's pure"—not "the moment's hit" they play on the radio and it has a huge audience, but it just passes away.

There are certain songs that were big hits in 2004, but if you hear them now, they don't have a feeling about them.

They don't even take you back to that time when I can hear Michael Jackson's "Off the Wall" or N.W.A., and it takes me to an emotional place in my life, because the music has that emotion in it. If you look at hip-hop as a whole, you don't feel that love from art, that purity in music. It definitely has become the new dope game, a way to make money, which is the reason why it doesn't have the impact that it had before. . . . This culture is obviously strong, affecting the way people dress and talk. This is a powerful voice, the young Black voice of America. . . . Anybody who has a voice, you've got to let them tell their story. . . . I always wanted to be important in hip hop . . . to leave a mark and to help people. It's hard to see what you are in the world and the music business, the way you serve, but if you know your purpose and create art you feel is pure and sincere, you let the people decide who you are at that point. You don't stop and look too much, you have your purpose and you go for it.

**Esperanza Spalding (b. 1984 in Portland, Oregon):
“Little Miss Sunshine,” *Jazziz*, August 2008**

We had been visited by a young virtuoso, playing the bass and singing and writing and composing, in the way the story is told about great musicians of our past—Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Charlie Parker, Sarah Vaughan, Mary Lou Williams, Charles Mingus, Herbie Hancock, Stanley Clarke, Patrice Rushen, Jaco Pastorius, and so on. They were all virtuosos who were admired by millions as musical geniuses, with all the correct usage and meaning of the term—brilliantly gifted and taking the music in new directions.

But they, too, all landed in the culture of their times and were supported, loved, or ignored by the mainstream frame.

So what happens today when these kinds of young artists arrive, how do they fare in today’s marketplace?

Esperanza Spalding has done tremendously, and we watch the waves on all sides.

Spalding arrives in “meg-mindset media-driven” culture, as never before a jazz artist arrived.

An appearance on David Letterman as a young new jazz artist (age 23) in front of five million viewers, and subsequent performances at the White House at 26 years old is a different equation for exposure. I know Esperanza Spalding, engaged with her up close, have performed with her, hired her for gigs, and we have fussed about what music means. This *Jazziz* article appears as she is emerging publicly with her first CD, before the fame, before she was awarded the Grammy in 2011 for Best New Artist and in 2013 for Best Jazz Vocal, Best Instrumental Arrangement, and nominated for Best Long Form Video. Not since Patrice Rushen, in the 1970s, early ’80s, have we really had a young jazz virtuoso who was in the mainstream pop spray (Wynton certainly visible, but not in pop music trapping), seen right alongside Beyoncé, Alicia Keys, or Adele. She emerged as a jazz “never heard of before” and today five years later, she is a darling of “the new arrivals” club, a genuine jazz star, a rarity.

The *Jazziz* writer begins by stating, “Sooner or later, probably sooner, Spalding will be famous.” That much is true. Esperanza Spalding soon after became the most recognizable jazz musician of our times. “Oh, that bass player lady” is what young people say.

She responds to the writer, "I hope all this push goes somewhere, and it's not just like, ya know, 'Oh, Esperanza, what happened to that chick?'"

Well, well spoken, nobody has forgotten her at this point some six years later. She is "hot," as they say, the hottest piece of exciting new jazz artistry news in the marketplace today. No one stands close. And she stood up as a young woman artist against the tricks of marketplace product placement.

I gotta put my foot down next time, man. I gotta be like, "Oh, we're gonna be hardcore cutting-edge." Fuck this! . . . One of the main problems in the industry is you have marketing people running a business that's based around creative art. I'm not worried about it, though, because I know that I'm going to keep playing music. . . . I guess there's never any artist that gets complete control, at least at my age [then 23]. So in some ways I feel like what I do got a little bit watered down. But if that means more people will get hip to what I'm trying to do in the long run, then it's a sacrifice worth making. Know what I mean?

I'm really here I think to do music. Music, in of itself, exists outside of what happens. I mean, music is like this outside force that you are connected to. And that channel has nothing to do with anything, like on the planet. That channel has nothing to do with what I look like, or who my friends are or who likes or doesn't like the music. And the closer you get to that channel, the less it matters what else is going on.

A Taste of the Real

Let's be honest. I had to come face to face with my own "biggest demons," my closed mind, as I have looked at over the years, hip-hop artistry. I went from hating Snoop Dog, Ice Cube, and 50 Cent, because I didn't "get" where they were coming from, or why, to teaching Tupac, loving and understanding him as an important icon of our culture. I later met Teddy Riley, Flavor Flav, and hosted Chuck D at my school. For 20 years I was writing on hip-hop culture as a musician for articles/essays, culture reports, the BET award show, interviewing Russell Simmons, to NPR specials to books. So I have learned to "grow up" in and with hip-hop's curves. I began to see the personalities as rock stars and a particular poetic-narrative voice. I began as well to understand musically that hip-hop music was the next great aesthetic in Black music because it powerfully altered the way we see, understand, and

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feel the backbeat and pulse and the way we respond to language and rhyme patterns, as integral to music expression now. I felt the vibe, the flavor, and the flow. I understand it and I believe all that. But Lil Wayne and Wiz Khalifa still made me shudder to think Black music was coming to be partly defined as artistry coming from these guys. They project and represent the things those southern racists in the 1950s put out on tracks urging all White Americans to not buy Black music because it would destroy White youth. Yet watching any YouTube video of concerts these days, the majority of the audience who go to these concerts are White youth. It's clear their workings represent millions of young buyers and watchers all over the planet.

The youth, rebelliousness, hard-core narrative, drugs, drinking, the rock and the roll of it, are just parts of the American pop music narrative. Get over it. These features represent a sounding in our culture and connect to the themes that are relevant for exploring the world we live in, like it or not.

Living in such a sea of images, words, concepts, and values that are seemingly disrespectful and sacrilegious can be disturbing.

Wiz Khalifa (b. 1987): "Taylor Gang," *Source*, No. 252

"Let's get medicated," from the Wiz Khalifa video saturated in weed smoking, for me was as about as real and right to it as I have ever seen. Is that even legal to do?

And so in this *Source* magazine interview, the writers were turning up to make a show of the rapper's entrepreneurial side by highlighting his band/crew as it emerged as a brand that represents his "empire." He talks directly to this.

"Every day is a business day for us. We're never off of work. We're never doing normal stuff. Definitely the most important thing is to build brand, as far as my label, the artists, just building that up. The brand would run into fashion, movies, etc. but peopl20e gotta identify with people selling first. It's a lifestyle."

Wiz Khalifa continues about his crew and how they interact (Juicy J, Lola Monroe, Chevy Woods, Sledgren, Cardo, and Wiz—"Taylor Gang")

"It's just more organic than anything people have seen in a long time. They each have their own personalities. They see the group of people that I'm with. They see how much they identify with me. I got a group of people that I'm around that trust me as captain. We're a group. And I

don't think the game has really seen people who go to the studio together. They haven't seen that in a long time."

The writer, Kim Osorio, shares that Wiz was discovered at 16, in his home of Pittsburgh, signed to Atlantic records. One producer, Sledgren, stated, "The music is unlike anything else out there. . . . It's just to let people know that they can be themselves. They don't always have to rap about what other people are rapping about and what other people are doing. It's always been something different about Wiz. The first time I heard him, I was like 'Whoa. This is not what I'm used to hearing.'"

Wiz's business plan, at this point, was moving toward 100 million.

"That's a part of being successful, having a fully operating machine. What other people might consider being successful, that's not what I consider being successful. I feel like I accomplished a lot, musically. There is success in the industry and there is success in life. Being successful in life is being able to make people happy. Whether you have money or not."

Well, he deals in a lot of smoke, my goodness! He has a clear voice, and I guess he clearly is representing Pittsburgh, all stacks, all days, all ways.

Miguel (b. 1985) and Kendrick Lamar (b. 1987): "Leaders of the New Cool," *Vibe*, May 2013

The 25- and 26-year-old LA friends called the Leaders of the New School of R&B and Hip Hop are brought together in a riveting discussion on the meaning of their current work.

It is clear in the hip-hop game that they all listen to each other, they study the industry road maps, and they have deep respect for what has been commercially successful in their genre.

They both speak powerfully about what their music doing means to them.

Lamar speaks first to the question of general impressions of Miguel's music in the marketplace:

From an R&B perspective, I always felt like it's been missing depth of actually telling a story. Everything on the radio has been cliché. But when you get a body of work like Miguel's, you hear actual intricate details and lines where it is not just saying, "Come here, girl, blah, blah,

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blah.” You’re hearing the steps to get there. And that’s the part of R&B that’s been missing for a long time.

To actually hear somebody new doing it and taking pride in such intricate details that make the song that much better, it makes you want to ride to it all day. I come from the world of oldies and gangsta rap. My pops probably played more R&B and vocalists in the house than gangsta rap, so I always listened for lyrics that make the women feel good.

The author asks further about the definition of musical genius.

Lamar continues, “Somebody that doesn’t really have any boundaries, that’s not confined to the traditional sounds. When you listen to ‘Adorn,’ it feels like he’s not trying to structure a radio joint. He just felt the music, felt the instrumentation and wrote the track.” He goes on, “Those [Jay-Z, Kanye, etc.] are genius minds and that’s good for the culture of hip-hop, to know that we have people in the game before us that are willing to explore. It gives me a little more confidence in what I’m doing when I think back on all the emcees that have done that.”

Vibe writer John Kennedy continues, with Miguel, “Describe your creative process. How do musical ideas form into songs?”

Miguel delivers:

My dad used to take me to Cabrillo Beach, like where the projects started in San Pedro.

It’s like a 10-minute drive but one thing I learned early on is that no waves are the same. They come at different speeds, from different directions. The waves break differently. I wasn’t necessarily big on surfing but it was something that you learn as a kid when you’re just playing in the damn ocean. So as I started to get into my creative process, I realized that the situations you’re in as a musician is very much like playing in the ocean. You never know where the inspiration is gonna come from. It comes from different directions, different speeds. You just have to be ready to ride the wave when it comes. . . . My creative process usually starts with a guitar.

Sometimes, it starts with a word, like *adorn* . . . there have been times when it’s literally been driving and seeing a billboard and something in the advertisement caught my eye. . . . As artists and musicians, we’re just trying to capture lightning in a bottle, that’s where the inspiration comes. Just ride the waves as it comes.

Well, I study at the ocean too, and I created a line of thinking that I swear Miguel took from my writings. And that he hit on this being a

young person from ocean culture blew me out of the water. His response, like Esperanza’s, made me feel proud of what many younger artists are representing, although I still have my feelings about a ton of things.

The Lamar poetry from “Bitch Don’t Kill My Vibe” is a powerful verse and can stand up to Dylan, Elton John/Bernie Taupin, Carole King, Sting, or Ralph Ellison. It’s biting, absurd, and unruly, and totally what art in modernity does—turns everything upside down and inside out, and even as you don’t like it, you must pass through it, and it touches you, somehow.

That scene where Kendrick in “Bitch Don’t Kill My Vibe” . . . is being baptized unknowingly in a pool of the alcohol he loves, is shocked that it’s alcohol, and the minister is administering the ritual. This speaks loudly to me that a growing segment of young people see the church traditions as “theater” and not relevant. To me, that is a sad social commentary, more than “God hating” or a lack of fear of God. I think they are taking a punch at institutionalized religion. I think the line “preachers and politicians all seem like game show hosts to me,” a great Sting line, hints at this.

Great music is always social-cultural critique.

Zeitgeist, Culture Criticism, What They Said, and What That Suggests

Askia Touré points out that “You could call it the collective consciousness of a given people at a certain time,” which hints at the power of images and ideas carried by these young artists. And so our role in cultural criticism is an entry into an examination of what the artists mean in some ways. So if you took what was said about contemporary meaning—identity, gender, image construction, sexual expression, exploring purpose, music and meaning, process, economic control, power, art, culture, industry practice, social-political expression—one could say you examined part of the zeitgeist of your times, or at least taken a sampling of it.

These artists speak on these ideas in various ways:

That’s where I learned to play and sing at the same time. The best way to do it is to get it at a gig where no one’s listening and just do it. . . . This is what I love and I’m lucky that I get to do what I love and make a living. Not many people get that. I love it. I always play music, and I always will. My career could go down the toilet and I will still have a very satisfying musical life.

—Norah Jones

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Table 6.1.

Identity	"I made a decision to be unique and now it's a part of my DNA." (Janelle Monae)
Gender, Image Construction	"One of the things nobody understands about me is, everything thus far has gone according to plan They [the public] don't realize that I am very calculating." (Nicki Minaj)
Image Construction, Identity	"They [the public, us] just don't understand me. I just think people straight up don't know who I am; they just know what I look like, they know the idea of me. But, they'll learn more this time, because now I let my guard down, and I'm more comfortable just being myself. That's exactly what I want to be. And even on the album, you definitely get a glimpse of my personality." (Rihanna)
Sexual Expression	"At the end of a concert, I don't feel like I've been this sexy thing. Really, I don't even think about it. Unless it's a song that really calls for it, like 'Skin' or 'S&M,' or when I cover 'Darling Nikki.' There's a section that's called 'Sex' in the show, which is the obvious section for sexuality." (Rihanna)
Exploring Purpose, Culture, Music, and Meaning	"I feel like we all have a purpose in life, and through my music and art, I want people from all walks of life to become enlightened, and enjoy, and be entertained and encouraged." (Common)

I'm not a fan of self-indulgence. For me music is, "I want to feel good" or "I want to dance," as opposed to me singing about my growing up in Hawaii and my struggle to relate. But I want to keep writing songs, man. There is a feeling you get from writing a good song that you don't get from anything else. You forever want that feeling, the same way you forever want to eat good food, you forever want to be in love.

—Bruno Mars

Process

My creative process usually starts with a guitar. Sometimes, it starts with a word, like adorn. . . . There have been times when it's literally been driving and seeing a billboard and something in the advertisement caught my eye. . . . As artists and musicians, we're just trying to capture lightning in a bottle, that's where the inspiration comes. Just ride the waves as it comes.

—Miguel

Economic Creative Control

One of the main problems in the industry is you have marketing people running a business that's based around creative art. I'm not worried about it,

though, because I know that I’m going to keep playing music. I guess there’s never any artist that gets complete control, at least at my age [then 23]. So in some ways I feel like what I do got a little bit watered down. But if that means more people will get hip to what I’m trying to do in the long run, then it’s a sacrifice worth making. Know what I mean?

—Esperanza Spalding

Power

Because I command respect. I’m not cocky, but I deserve to know what’s going on. It’s my brand and my life. That’s my advice to women in general: even if you’re doing a nine to five job, treat yourself like a boss. Not arrogant, but be sure of what you want—and don’t allow people to run anything for you without your knowledge. You want everyone to know, “Okay, I can’t play games with her. I have to do right by this woman.” That’s what it’s all about.

—Nicki Minaj

Art, Culture

I believe in being a timeless artist, and at the same time it’s about transcending it, not worrying about rushing things or moving a certain way because of time.

—Janelle Monae

Somebody that doesn’t really have any boundaries, that’s not confined to the traditional sounds. When you listen to “Adorn,” it feels like he’s not trying to structure a radio joint. He just felt the music, felt the instrumentation, and wrote the track. . . . Those [Jay-Z, Kanye, etc.] are genius minds, and that’s good for the culture of hip-hop, to know that we have people in the game before us that are willing to explore.

—Kendrick Lamar

Industry Practices

Every day is a business day for us. We’re never off of work. We’re never doing normal stuff. Definitely the most important thing is to build brand, as far as my label, the artists, just building that up. The brand would run into fashion, movies, etc. but people gotta identify with people selling it first. It’s a lifestyle.

—Wiz Khalifa

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Spirituality

Once I stopped being chaperoned, and realized I had a choice in life, I was like, “Wow, there are a lot of choices.” I began to become a sponge for all that I had missed—the music, the movies. I was as curious as the cat. God is very much still a part of my life. . . . But the way the details are told in the Bible—that’s very fuzzy for me. And I want to throw up when I say that. But that’s the truth. . . . I still believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but I also believe in extra-terrestrials, and that there are people who are sent from God to be messengers, and all sorts of crazy stuff.

—Katy Perry

Social-Political Expression

This culture is obviously strong, affecting the way people dress and talk. This is a powerful voice, the young Black voice of America. . . . Anybody who has a voice, you’ve got to let them tell their story. . . . I always wanted to be important in hip-hop . . . to leave a mark and to help people. It’s hard to see what you are in the world and the music business, the way you serve, but if you know your purpose and create art you feel is pure and sincere, you let the people decide who you are at that point. You don’t stop and look too much; you have your purpose and you go for it.

—Common

Look inside of your soul and you can find out it never exists. How can I paint this picture when the color blind is hanging with ya . . . even a small lighter can burn a bridge. . . . I’m trying to keep it alive and not compromise the feeling we love. . . . You’re trying to keep it deprived and only cosign what radio does. . . . We live in a world on two different axles. . . . And I’m looking right past you. We live in a world, you living behind the mirror, I know what you scared of, the feeling of feeling emotions inferior. . . . This shit is vital. I know you had to die . . . I’ll let the people know this is something you can blame on yourselves, you can remain stuck in the box, Imma’ break out and then hide every lock.

—Kendrick Lamar

Conclusions

In today’s mainstreamed popular music, there is definitely the articulation of clear ideas and images, and the music is being used to carry contemporary expression, which represents human, social impulses. The use of

many musical conventions, styles, harmony, rhythms, and melodies—written and produced on instruments and technological sequencing in the songs—is vibrant. The American tradition of popular artistry is strongly in place. Older folks can’t say there is no good music or are no great singers out there—that is certainly not true. Our focus here was primarily on the ideas and the artistry. All these artists—Janelle Monae, Esperanza Spalding, Kendrick Lamar, Nicki Minaj, Katy Perry, Common, Norah Jones, Miguel, Justin Timberlake, Alicia Keys, and Rihanna—have all kinds of important and relevant things to say in music and words. A critical component is language: how the language is being used to convey ideas in the songs through traditions and how these artists define music and process and meaning itself. To look at this doesn’t mean we change our values; we just have to deal with a different set of evaluations and approaches on how we read the expression to get to their meaning in context. I was interested in what the artists had to say as musicians, their art conception, despite the cultural shifts largely driven by corporate ideas of profitability. It’s interesting to see how “being famous” is defined for them, the age differences and similarities (Common, b. 1972, Rihanna, b. 1988), and levels of “stardom” (Katy Perry, Norah Jones, Justin Timberlake, Miguel), and how all this may affect how they define music. There were at least five constant references that a number of artists grabbed onto: branding, marketplace formulas as defined by selling something, staying in the game, forever being young as a limited demographic, and seeing themselves largely as a commodity, a product to be sold. All of these are “counter-art-intuitive”—which suggests their managements don’t seem to be primarily concerned about artistic identity, craft, sharing, or contributing to the art forms of music. In many cases, it’s mostly about gimmicks for sale to the marketplace. This is sad. Cultural, or marketplace, relevance is still a balancing act where the greater emphasis on the scale must be placed on the music!

I wanted to see if, taking a swipe at their ideas, how they would line up along traditional notions of art, culture, process, and meanings or help to today redefine and extend these notions. The culture has shifted, and the use of music is more commercially realized and amped up than ever before. Despite my quibbles, I was really moved by consistent references to art making, process, and musicality by their own definitions. That’s very cool, actually.

The economics alone are staggering (their discussions are about hundreds of millions of dollars), and the ability of artists to generate income

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from merchandising, endorsements, and being product-placement spokespeople for other products and interests is huge. The corporate world looks at young people creating attention, and that attention in what they do draws people, who then buy things. Again, they are pushing cologne, perfume, clothes, tattoos, drinks, food products, phones, tech devices, and TV shows, and then there's music.

So the contexts and the game have shifted. Artists think of their "game" differently. Even the symbols and languages have changed, which is no new thing either. What was once crude and rude is now just language that is crusty and racy. What was dangerous is daring, what was ugly is seen as a unique angle that adds value and visual interest and reflection. It's all a "mash-up," it's all stimulating, and so it's all "used in the mix." And it's all profitable because that's what people want.

My own conclusion is that our own definitions for what and how music means from contemporary new places must be tempered with the impulses of technology, commerciality, and the beat and focus of a kind of global external stimuli that accompanies the motion in the world. I mean, very little that I hear is created for beauty, reflections, or social political preparation. That's mostly gone now, and left to Beethoven, Ellington, and Baez, with a few shouts from India.Aire and Green Day.

Or we'll have to go out and catch a U2 tour or Earth, Wind and Fire, before it's too late. So, returning to the opening essay questions and considerations, no matter what one feels, these ideas represent a kind of take on cultural relevance, on what is actually happening in our times and what counts to people. The "I" theory is definitely in play. That is, in the 2015+ period, people act forward and are motivated to invent their own identity as a "brand," and that drives their own elevated sense of themselves as artists because they got recognized or made someone some money.

I do not believe this is a helpful formula for what makes either good music or artistry. It may all look and sound fabulous, but with me, it's not a sustainable feeling within. But that's just me.

Our popular artists have a stake in what this all means and today they actually usher in what is acceptable, and so their artistry is critical in defining our age. So this impulse begins to pulsate as it is currently defined by a different collection of characters, no puns intended. The questions are: Are we going to hear it? Will we obey? Will we bend to breathe the air of the current zeitgeist of our times?



Author rehearses ensemble, with a crowd watching.



Musicians communicating; Quincy Jones and Herbie Hancock pictured.



Musicians share; Bobby McFerrin on the right.



Musicians sharing in community.



Donald Harrison mentors musicians.



Musician teaching; photo of Patrice Rushen.



Musician teaching.



Musicians in the global world.



How we listen today, sharing connections.



Musicians listening in the language of music.



Choir rehearsal.



Musician sharing in a classroom.



Musician sharing in a classroom.



Artists.



Dance is an expression of life.



Musicians in session.



Making music in community.



Musicians thanking God.



The piano as a drum.



John Coltrane 30th Anniversary Concert in Boston



The author in Cuba, with the image of Che Guevara in the background.



Author with Cubans.



Cuban architecture.



Cuban architecture of homes.



Cuban State Singer.



Cuban Santería ritual.



Author with Cuban tres player.



Author at the Cuban Institute of Superior Arts.



Cuban on street with a live hawk.



Young man and girl star musicians.



Young Cuban artist.



Young Cuban artist, seeing himself in Jean Basquiat.



Santería dance.



Author with Cuban artist Orestes Gaulhiac.



"Playing with Other People's Heads" by Orestes Gaulhiac.



Ediel Bordon, a Cuban artist.



"An Interesting Past" by Ediel Bordon.



Author with both Cuban artists.



Author sits and plays with Cuban singer.



Cuban singer.



Loyana, bass player.

Part II
HISTORY
Backbones and Songs

CHAPTER SEVEN
A PROGRESSIVE VIEW OF
AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC
HISTORY, 1948–2014

One of the problems in the field of American popular music is the difficulty of tracing, tracking, and prioritizing the various historical/cultural streams and starting points in scholarship. How do we define relevant, and what directions do we track for a reliable discussion on the history of our musics?

In terms of the definitions of “American,” and who’s participating in the telling of the story, or where to begin, or who was “at the table” at the beginning of the formation of American music styles, it is tricky too, given the politics of writing a true historical narrative, a map, or a new approach to interpreting American popular music history. Who documented what, and what technologies are used and for what purposes? And the cultural politics involved—what did my people (Native American, African, Asian, European, etc.) or my community contribute as it relates to the history? We are reminded of the cultural criticism of even the term: his-story—that is, not my story or our story. Who are the people who invented the forms, what was the process, and what is contained in the forms that distinguish this or that as original, new, or American? What were the causative factors that gave rise to the music, and how did the public receive it? What do we plug into—radio, recordings, shows—that then become recording styles, and therefore relevant? Then there are stage works and the mediums of sheet music, and now YouTube. Deciding which narrative of our music history we should focus on and its relation to other movements in culture becomes challenging, because America, history, and popular culture are huge and complex narratives. What artists were “famous” or “popular” and what impact did that artistry have that was defining in a way that informs or shapes the formation, the start of this form, or style of that one?

As in all these essays, there is no “one way or perspective,” but the idea is to raise up enough substantive platforms that help to define, decode, and construct a perspective that is wide, global, and informed.

Angles to Consider

For John Covach, author of *What's That Sound? An Introduction to Rock and Its History*, his work tracks popular music through three lenses in this order: Tin Pan Alley, country and R&B, leading to the rock and roll of the 1950s. He writes, “In the first half of the twentieth century, sheet music was the principal way to sell music in the Tin Pan Alley era, the basic unit of trade was the song itself.”

David P. Szatmary, from his *Rockin' in Time: A Social History of Rock and Roll*, emphasizes the importance of African American culture as the “breeding ground” for the development of modern rock and roll as well as popular music. Szatmary emphasizes the importance of the struggle for equality and states, “This book places rock rebellion in larger social and cultural contexts. . . . [I]t deals with rock-and-rollers who have reflected and sometimes changed the social fabric.”

In his classic *American Music: A Panorama*, Daniel Kingman writes, “This work offers a panoramic survey, which directs the eye first to one and then another of the more or less parallel streams of American music.” This is based on a triangular view of three kinds of art: folk art, fine art, and popular art. He sees six streams: folk music, native religious music, rural south, commercial entertainment music, jazz music, and lastly, fine art music. He calls these the “six intermingling and mutually influential streams.”

Hugh Gregory's *A Century of Pop* uses the gramophone as “the chronological benchmark and looks at the relationships between influences and musical styles that make up the mosaic of 20th century music.” He states that the strongest impact “has emanated from Afro-Caribbean” sources and “permeates most strata of contemporary popular music—jazz, soul, R&B, gospel, blues, reggae, rock and roll, and rock.”

Ted Gioia's *The History of Jazz* speaks about the synergistic process, syncretism as

the blending together of cultural elements that previously existed separately. This dynamic, so essential to the history of jazz, remains powerful

A PROGRESSIVE VIEW OF AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC HISTORY

even in the present day, when African American styles of performance blend seamlessly with other musics of other cultures, European, Asian, Latin, and coming full circle, African. . . .

This ability of African performance arts to transform the European tradition of composition while assimilating some of its elements is perhaps the most striking and powerful evolutionary force in the history of modern music. The genres of music that bear the marks of this influence are legion. Let's name a few: gospel, spirituals, soul, rap, minstrel songs, Broadway musicals, ragtime, jazz, blues, R&B, rock, samba, reggae, funk, salsa, calypso, even some contemporary operatic and symphonic music.

These six writers all enter the discussion from slightly different angles, but all highlight a critical idea that there is a great mix of sharing, cross-fertilization, and syncretism among parallel contributing cultural groups throughout our history. Some of the defining starting points from these writers are: technology as the chronological benchmark, sheet music/business as the basic unit of trade, culture and syncretism of styles as crucially defining, and folk beginnings or urban migrations that define the entering points to steer the exploration and examination of American popular music.

The question from me still remains: If it is even relevant, what is the genesis of this conglomeration, and what impact did this music have on shaping and inspiring the development of American popular musics? What's the causation? Secondly, what comes first—the people, the product, or popular tastes that define it? Or what is the role of the technology that brings it to life? Assessing the shaping roles of the common everyday listener, the critical press, mass marketed media, historians who talk about its formation and value, are as well of note. In other words, who was talking about things, how did they document the happenings? It has been stated in these essays that music education should equip students to think about themselves as participating and contributing in and to culture, critically thinking about meanings and expressions from the view of a critical, creative thinker.

The teaching role here is to lead as a tour guide, pulling together an illustrative narrative, an overview, that is reflective of artistry and the social movements that gave rise to music. Today, a global worldview is absolutely essential to our vitality as citizens. These impulses—a multiethnic world and a host of strategies and views found in contemporary culture, artistic creation, production, education, and business—broaden the understanding, definition, and direction of contemporary music culture.

This tracking begins with early U.S. emergence and documentation of the types of common folk music and popular music performance in specific communities (American roots music), musicians sharing with and among the people. I then move to the medium of technology, radio, phonographs, TV, media, and magazines as these expressions became popularized across the country. My hope here is that this essay is a helpful guide, highlighting some larger significant and defining themes and movements in mainstream American popular culture development.

As the opening here illustrates, there is no end to the debates of what constitutes an inclusive approach to exploring the very rich terrain of American popular music. These are “touch points” that will hopefully provide a helpful view into its social, cultural, and creative development.

Charting a Journey

One helpful traditional view might be to think of the music in terms of artistry emerging chronologically, through their development in decades and as recognized performance styles of documented music that then become nationally popularized.

Culturally speaking, people from all over the world came to the United States with their own cultural traditions: games, songs, dances, art, and stories. Through these folk practices, they remember family and friends, and enact beliefs, rituals, customs, and memories; in the process, they nurture connections to their homelands. The songs they brought with them—and the new ones they created here to speak about new experiences—helped them maintain solidarity with their home communities; at the same time, this music helped them make sense of, and make their way in, their new surroundings.

People everywhere use artistic expression—including dance, poetry, and art—to speak about and celebrate life. Music, as an art form that encompasses so many different types of expressions and that has the capability to convey so much information, is a particularly valuable lens through which to look at history. We often call the first early expressions of American popular music—including folk, country, blues, gospel, and many others—American roots music.

This music was the voice of the common man, the everyday singing of community members. Largely an acoustic music (that is, there was no

electricity involved), American roots music was the first unique musicality born of conversations between neighbors, families, and friends. Folks remember this kind of music making and talk about it.

Beginnings: A Topical View of Styles and Artistry through the Decades

Although printed materials—including newspapers, books, and pamphlets—had long carried images and stories about the songs and musical traditions of native and immigrant populations throughout the United States, it was the technological developments in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that spread new musical sounds all over the country with a rapidity and ease that had never been experienced before. These inventions—such as Thomas Edison’s phonograph (an early form of record player invented in 1877), radio broadcasts and programming in the 1920s, and the rising popularity of movies—contributed significantly to the spread of what we now think of as American roots music. Fiddle contests, barn dances, juke joints, community halls, and churches were places where people used music to celebrate their lives and renew connections with each other. These musical traditions soon became a language that people used to communicate and celebrate together.

Over time, musicians further developed technical mastery on instruments such as the banjo, guitar, mandolin, piano, drums, and horns, giving rise to wholly new performance styles and musical genres. As the director of the Jazz Archives at Tulane University in New Orleans, Bruce Rayburn has a vested interest in keeping these early musical styles—many of which were regionally based—alive. Speaking of legendary Crescent City musicians like Earl King and Earl Palmer, players whose performance styles helped to define the city’s sound, Rayburn says, “Keeping that continuity and connection with modern music is really important for New Orleans.” The raw materials of New Orleans’s musical culture give young people a portal into New Orleans and the development of contemporary music that allows them to be inquisitive about their own development.

The Mississippi River works as an analogy for the development of culture: It highlights the processes of how culture gets built upwards on the river, and how the music flows into other cities. Work songs, slave songs, spirituals, field hollers, Creole songs, arias, band music, Indian music—these

all get interpreted by musicians and played in bands. For New Orleans, the beat rules. A national cultural identity and a mainstream identity cannot be built without developing first regional cultural realities.

Cultural Families

There are generally four recognized cultural-ethnic groups whose musics form the foundation of what we think of as American roots music—Native American, African American, European American, and Latin American—but these can be extended and expanded to include many more cultural groups, religions, and communities, encompassing traditions from all over the world. Some of the music that originated on North American soil and became known as roots music includes, but is not limited to, Native American ceremonial songs, Black spiritual and early gospel, rural folk songs and hymns, and blues. A variety of musical performance styles from inside the church (known as “sacred”) and outside of the church (or “secular”), as well as traditions from the Caribbean islands, Haiti, Cuba, South America, and Mexico have influenced many American musical communities. These genres are, as the title suggests, the roots from which American popular music grew. As Antonín Dvořák, an important European composer, once noted, “All the great musicians have borrowed from the songs of the common people. . . . Inspiration for a truly national music might be derived from the Negro melodies or Indian chants. . . . The important thing is that the inspiration for such music should come from the right source, and that music itself should be a true expression of the people’s real feelings.”

Some of the Major Developments in American Music

These are also some helpful historical events that have defined the cultural-musical chronology. These all fold into the recognized mid-20th-century development of “defined” styles and forms (blues, jazz, rock, pop) of most popular musics heard on radio and mainstream popular media of the 1920s and beyond. What’s of interest here, as well, is the coming together of folk, religious, social-cultural, and technological impulses that have continually shaped the music.

Table 7.1.

1619	First enslaved Africans arrive at Jamestown
1651	Bay Psalm Book, colonial hymns, work songs, field hollers emerge on plantations
1707	Isaac Watts's hymns published
1730	Great Awakening revivals (colonies). Spirituals emerge afterward.
1774	An Englishman reports about "Negro fiddle jigs"
1776	American Revolution
1770–1830	Second Great Awakening (Logan County, Kentucky). Participants complain that the "Blacks" were singing loud their "spiritual songs" and mixing in popular themes.
1788	First Black church established, Savannah Baptist
1794	Founding of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME)
1801	Richard Allen, Black church bishop, publishes <i>Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs</i>
1820–1870	Black minstrel shows, Zip Coon, Jim Crow characters. American song publishing is born.
1820s	Philadelphia first "school of Black musicians"
1837	Francis Johnson (1792–1844, Philadelphia), first African American to arrange American music, sails to Europe and performs
1861–1865	Civil War/1865; Emancipation Proclamation frees Blacks in 1863
1867	Publication of <i>Slave Songs in the United States</i> , William Allen Garrison
1867	Founding of Boston, New England, Cincinnati Conservatories
1870	Touring of the Fisk Jubilee Singers (American/European)
1877	Thomas Edison patents the phonograph in 1887; Emile Berliner invents gramophone
1892–1895	Antonín Dvořák directs National Conservatory in New York, establishes first "conservatory-trained" Black composers, Will Marion Cook, Harry Burleigh
1897	Jazz is born as legalized entertainment music in New Orleans
1898	<i>Clorindy: The Origin of the Cakewalk</i> (Will Marion Cook) is the first all-Black musical on Broadway
1899	Scott Joplin publishes his <i>Maple Leaf Rag</i>
1901	Victor Talking Machine Company records Bert Williams, George Walker singing Black songs from the period
1903	Scott Joplin composes his opera <i>A Guest of Honor</i> ; 1908–1917; works on, then completes his major opera, <i>Tremonisha</i> —the first American operas written by a Black composer; Joplin dies in 1917
1912–1914	James Reese Europe's Clef Club Orchestra, an all-Black orchestra (100+), performs music by Black composers at Carnegie Hall
1912	W. C. Handy publishes his <i>Memphis Blues</i>
1915	Jelly Roll Morton publishes <i>Jelly Roll Blues</i> , first published as a jazz arrangement
1916	Great Migration of Blacks from the South to northern cities
1920	Mamie Smith records <i>Crazy Blues</i> , first major recording by a Black American artist, sets the stage for Race Records and Black popular music catalogue
1920s	The Harlem Renaissance happens in New York

(continued)

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Table 7.1. (Continued)

1923	The WSM/Grand Ole Opry radio show, Nashville, Tennessee, with host George Hay, broadcasts begin. This technological advance on the radio (WSM) becomes the “home” and birth of widestream popularized American folk music traditions. The music was first created in rural communities but now heard as “popular” on the radio.
1927	Duke Ellington appears at the Cotton Club, New York, and national broadcasts of his orchestra propel his group to national stardom, and thus becomes a worldwide symbol of an American popular music standard
1931	<i>The Afro-American Symphony</i> , William Grant Still. This was the first symphony composed by a Black composer based on Black vernacular music and conventions (blues).
1934	Virgil Thompson’s <i>Four Saints in Three Acts</i> is the first “mainstream” produced American opera with all Black cast
1935	George Gershwin’s <i>Porgy and Bess</i> called first “American folk opera”
1940	Minton’s Club, bebop develops
1950s	Founding of Atlantic Records, the birth of mainstream commercial rhythm and blues; Bill Haley’s “Rock around the Clock”; Alan Freed Rock Radio Shows; Elvis Presley (post–War World II revolutionaries)
1960s	Bob Dylan, Motown (Berry Gordy), Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, James Brown (Soul Music, Billboard category born, 1969)
1970s	Disco era
1979	Rappers Delight, Sugar Hill Gang, industry creation of hip-hop
1980–2000	MTV, BET video mania, Arrested Development, Me’Shell Ndegéocello, Alanis Morissette
2000	50 Cent, Black Eyed Peas, Beyoncé, Jay-Z, Justin Timberlake

Rural Folk Song and Hymns: Some Early Glimpses

The first early folk songs from the Old World date to 16th-century England. These songs, which drew melodically from English, Scottish, and Irish musical traditions, were often accompanied by fiddle or dulcimer. Broadside ballads (common song lyrics and melodies printed on large paper sheets similar to newspapers) were a popular method of musical dissemination in what is now the United Kingdom; these soon became Americanized as settlers mixed these melodies and songs with their own new American experiences, creating new versions that became the basis for much American popular music today.

Religious music was another of the earliest forms of music that crossed the ocean with European settlers. This included Protestant and Catholic hymns, classical music forms and styles from the courts, and European folk ballads, songs, and dances. In addition, the Pilgrims brought over Psalters—hymnbooks such as the *Bay Psalm Book*—which contained old European religious songs and texts.

Trained deacons taught much of this music, and ministers used a process called “lining out,” in which they sang each line of the hymn first and the congregation would then repeat in harmony.

Other methods of musical instruction, including sacred harp and shape note singing, helped people remember the songs and melodies. Singing schools were sometimes formed to teach communities in churches how to sing the tunes “properly.” To accompany the school singing, quartet singers used shape notebooks, and these were among the first sacred singing ensembles that traveled from place to place.

Resistance to British rule also shaped American folk music. As new settlers worked to distinguish themselves from Europe, their folk music as well took on a distinctly separate hue, particularly after the Revolutionary War. Songs such as “Yankee Doodle Dandy,” which first appeared in the 1750s, were hugely popular among new settlers.

Old Time Folk Music

Thomas Edison’s 1877 invention of the phonograph machine was a truly innovative way of bringing music to the people. This technological development later paved the way for General Electric, a corporation formed by Edison in 1892. This move had serious implications for music and, later, motion pictures, TV, and other media.

The first audio recording device was called the “talking machine.” The talking machine first appeared in 1877 as an expansion of the telephone concept, which had been introduced a year earlier by Alexander Graham Bell. In essence, the talking machine allowed music to be recorded onto a wax cylinder; the audio contained on the cylinder was then reproduced in larger numbers on shellac discs. This new recording technology greatly facilitated the advent of the recording industry.

At the end of the 19th century, new companies—including the Columbia Phonograph Company, the Edison Speaking Phonograph Company, and the National Phonograph Company—with a vested interest in these new recording and distribution technologies began to emerge. In the year 1900, sales of phonograph records topped \$1 million for the first time.

Eldridge R. Johnson formed the Victor Talking Machine Company in 1901, and in 1919, Otto K. E. Heinemann introduced his first releases on Okeh Records, a label now known largely for its releases by African American blues performers such as Mamie Smith.

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Many similar independent labels issued early blues and jazz recordings, such as the African American owned and operated Black Swan Recording Company, which first appeared in the fall of 1922. It is easy to see how American popular music—through its mixing of folk music via modern technologies—became a huge, and hugely influential, industry.

By the beginning of the 20th century, music entrepreneurs specializing in the selling of instruments, record players, and phonograph recordings began to become a very visible part of American commerce; many musical products were found in stores alongside medicine, furniture, and other regularly used common objects. In 1923, Virginia's Fiddlin' John Carson recorded with record producer Ralph Peer in Atlanta, Georgia; the results were released later that year on Okeh Records and were almost immediately successful. In 1927, Peer recorded musicians Jimmie Rodgers and the iconic Carter family in Bristol, Tennessee; his work, and the work of those he recorded, contributed greatly to the canon of what we now think of as roots music, and helped to create the model for recording companies that followed.

It was largely through the popularity of the newly invented radio that this music reached American homes throughout the South, Midwest, and beyond.

The most prominent, early defining radio show was WSM's Grand Ole Opry, which began broadcasting out of Nashville, Tennessee, in 1925. Celebrated Opry announcer George D. Hay brought barn dances, fiddle bands, and rural singers to the airwaves, and the Grand Ole Opry became the premier venue for "old-time" roots music. Exceedingly popular, listeners waited by the radio for the songs they liked. On the strength of the Grand Ole Opry, Nashville became the center for recording, both radio and publishing, which helped to develop and cement this great American popular music style. There is something "home-style" about these charming country songs.

Singing, dancing, entertaining, relating to audiences—these were all part of what drove this music. These early stars of the Grand Ole Opry were celebrities, and their audiences loved them. Radio was the most widespread and accessible way to hear their music. In addition, wind-up Victrola record players allowed you to hear music such as rural country songs, church songs, ragtime, blues, and marches. As people become accustomed to hearing these songs and purchasing them, there developed public tastes and expectations, creating widespread, popular demand for music that grew out of everyday

communities. As it became accepted as a part of everyday life, music became “popular.” While more radio broadcast towers spread the songs, popular recording stars began to enter the homes of everyday Americans. One such celebrity was the Grand Ole Opry’s Roy Acuff (1903–1992), a fiddler and bandleader considered the “king of country music” by the 1940s. Acuff, with his band, the Smoky Mountain Boys, became the symbol of country music’s aesthetic, which incorporated American values such as community, pride, belief in hard work, and patriotism.

Later artists like western swing pioneer Bob Wills (1905–1975) mixed Memphis blues, New Orleans jazz, and Texas fiddle traditions to create wholly new musical hybrids. Country music provided a great model for how musicians mixed American songs and genres together in distinctive popular styles.

More Spreading Out

As early as 1910, musicologist John Lomax was collecting early American songs—including what he called “cowboy songs”—as they spread west. Scholars like Lomax were interested in collecting music that was becoming identified with important regional cultures throughout the country. Following in his father’s footsteps, John Lomax’s son, Alan Lomax, continued the important work of collecting.

Using a recording machine that barely fit in the trunk of their car, the Lomaxes traveled from community to community, recording performers such as Leadbelly (born Hudie William Ledbetter in 1885).

At the time of his initial recordings with the Lomaxes, Leadbelly was incarcerated at the Angola Prison Farm in Louisiana; he later became an internationally known American folk artist whose work largely set the path for modern folk music tradition later taken up by Woody Guthrie, Odetta, Bob Dylan, and others.

Bluegrass and Honky-Tonk

Bluegrass was a post–World War II musical phenomenon. With roots in barn dances and church singing, bluegrass appealed primarily to working-class audiences. In the 1940s, Kentucky musician Bill Monroe (1911–1996) and his band, The Bluegrass Boys, began to popularize the burgeoning bluegrass style. Deeply inspired by African American

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blues traditions—Monroe himself learned to play from a Black musician named Arnold Schultz—Bill Monroe hired banjo virtuoso Earl Scruggs as a Bluegrass Boy in 1945, thereby cementing his place as the “father of bluegrass.” As well, as conscious music listeners, these musicians were inspired by country and bluegrass as well as the bebop and jazz music that was played on the radio in the 1930s and ’40s.

They came up with a new approach to playing by traveling, recording, and doing radio shows. Moreover, bluegrass groups expanded their fan bases through radio, films, and recordings. As people retreated into local taverns to socialize after long days of work, another style of country music began to soundtrack these experiences: honky-tonk. Ernest Tubb and Lefty Frizzell, two early honky-tonk stars, made music that reflected the trials and tribulations of working-class life, love, and liquor in song.

Country and blues were even more deeply intertwined by perhaps the most famous honky-tonk singer of all: Hank Williams (1923–1953). Williams, who died at the young age of 29 after having multiple songs become smash hits, was one of the preeminent country songwriters, penning tunes about high times and lost love. These singers’ music connected to people in real and direct ways.

The Track of Blues in New Orleans, New York, Chicago, and Beyond

Early Impulses

One of the first American commercial recordings to have significant impact on the shaping of our popular musical traditions was “Crazy Blues,” a tune written by Percy Bradford and recorded by singer Mamie Smith in 1920. Released by Okeh Records, “Crazy Blues” sold 75,000 copies in its first week of release—a massive number at that time—and started a wave of interest in the phenomenon of American popular music styles.

During the era before the advent of recordings that could be purchased, music was obtainable as sheet music; many of these pieces—played by the popular bands of the day—were military songs, cotillions, quadrilles, marches, patriotic pieces, arrangements of European popular arias, and minstrel music.

Even earlier though, Francis Frank Johnson (1792–1844) was a famous African American musician and bandleader from Philadelphia; on

the strength of his reputation as a master musician, he traveled to Europe in 1837 to give a series of concerts that included many of these aforementioned styles. These early American styles would later be exemplified in the music of John Phillip Sousa (1854–1932), a composer known as the “March King” for his mastery of patriotic march composition. Sousa’s “Stars and Stripes Forever” is the national march of the United States.

Minstrel Music

The American minstrel song tradition of the 1840s was the most popular music of the 19th century (popular songs exemplified by someone such as American songwriter, Stephen Foster, 1826–1864). This was a pre-radio-age tradition that by the end of the 1800s was seen and obtained by Americans through printed sheet music.

Unfortunately many songs in the early 19th-century minstrel show tradition—live performances in which mainly White showmen in “black-face” would lampoon African American culture—were an extremely popular form of entertainment. The song repertoire—often known as “coon songs”—performed at minstrel shows, and again later published as sheet music, and represents a particularly striking example of the American experience played out in music. Many of the indecent songs were the result of rural White southerners’ and northerners’ imitation and insult of Black music slave-song styles. These songs, on the whole, were very harmful and hateful particularly to Black Americans and ethnic Americans. Yet these songs as well celebrated the most “American” of all music and styles, the slave songs, and styles from African American communities, southern song traditions, and dances. These songs paved the way for America dealing with race conflicts, providing some resolution, and transforming American music into the unique forms and styles most widely known today.

By World War I, minstrel shows, in decline since the turn of the 20th century, were replaced and out of fashion, but the mixture of styles and images, and the dilemma of social conflict and race, remained a permanent part of the American music culture mix well into the 20th century.

By the late 19th century, New Orleans, a major southern port, had become a true cultural crossroads; it was at this crossroads that African, European, Caribbean, and other cultural elements began to blend into a singular, rich gumbo.

New Orleans, Ragtime

New Orleans-style band music had been performed by Crescent City musicians such as Buddy Bolden, Freddie Keppard, King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, and the Original Dixieland Jazz Band from the late 1800s well into the early 20th century.

The music began to travel by boat and train to points as far distant as Chicago and California; as musicians migrated from town to town—to urban cities in the South and North—the world was awakened to a new kind of music—jazz—that incorporated those minstrel-like tunes. The early New Orleans bands drew on march songs, funeral music processions, and local ethnic songs as well as rural and Black church music traditions and the blues to create jazz music. This was mixed in with another early 20th-century American local music that traveled: ragtime piano music, a music that was led by a pianist, composer, and music teacher from Missouri named Scott Joplin (1868–1917). His most well-known song, the “Maple Leaf Rag,” named for a local Missouri social club, was first published in 1899 and went on to become a huge 20th-century popular instrumental music hit.

As these styles (including early printed songs, blues, ragtime, and jazz) were played by traveling musicians, America began to hear its own music: first, from printed sheet music, and then later on recordings that captured these styles and artists. American popular music has yielded a body of songs that speak of America’s rich geography, from the valleys of Southern California to the country hills of West Texas; from the blues streets that Langston Hughes rhapsodized over to swamps, rivers, snow-white cotton fields, and cornstalk plains.

The increase in recordings and, soon, radio programs, made it possible for people in the early 20th century to hear these styles, inspiring them to create more of their own.

More and more singers and musicians were beginning to hear and see these styles, and in so doing, borrowed, mixed up, and combined these cultural styles to create a new American popular music. Jazz in America was “growing up” and becoming modernized. During this period, jazz became its own culturally coded music with dance, images, and personalities. It was born in New Orleans, cemented in cosmopolitan and modern America in the 20th century, and flowered in northern cities like New York, Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City, and Washington, D.C. In 1932, Duke Ellington, one of the premiere American bandleaders, musicians,

and composers, penned the hit “It Don’t Mean a Thing, if It Ain’t Got That Swing.” This is the mantra of the era. Everything had to swing. The beboppers were the younger, next generation of musicians to define jazz’s first musical revolution “from inside the music.”

The Emergence of Mainstream Modern Popular Music in America: Cities

The emergence of a more fully blown American popular music and transition from everyday common people, neighborhood folk music, into the modern model can be seen as the music leaves New Orleans and goes to other metropolitan cities, in the process becoming mainstream. By 1914 (the year World War I began), ragtime was the American popular music of the day. Moreover, entertainment venues now offered musicians real opportunities: New Orleans trumpeter Freddie Keppard traveled to Los Angeles, followed by Jelly Roll Morton in 1917. By 1920, jazz had essentially replaced ragtime as the most popular music in America.

Mainstream popular music emanated from four major cities in the first part of the new century: New Orleans, Chicago, New York, and Kansas City. At the beginning of the century, the city of Chicago, Illinois, had stockyards and factories that drew thousands of migrating southern musicians northward in search of work and a better way of life, a journey that is often referred to as “the Great Migration.” Chicago newspapers encouraged hundreds of thousands of southerners to leave their homes and travel to Chicago throughout the first part of the 20th century. Many Black musicians left to play in other cities. The end of World War I brought the closing of New Orleans’s infamous red-light district called Storyville. This area was home to multiple entertainment venues known for drawing numerous musicians from the area for work. New cities, venues, and audiences needed to be found. The music migrations were on.

Louis Armstrong’s mentor, Joe “King” Oliver, left New Orleans for Chicago in 1918, eventually finding a gig playing at a venue called Lincoln Gardens.

This move, which brought new musical styles north, made a huge splash in Chicago, prompting Louis Armstrong to leave New Orleans to join Oliver there in 1922. Armstrong became the most famous and widely known star of early jazz, as well as its principal instrumental virtuoso.

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Born in 1901, Louis Armstrong represented the new face of a modern, urbane, American popular music at the turn of the century. Following his tenure in Chicago with “King” Oliver, Armstrong traveled to New York; through recordings and appearances, he became jazz’s first international star. Arguably no other artist in American music brought as much visibility to American music, values, and innovation in the arts than Louis Armstrong. He single-handedly defined jazz improvisation, in the process transforming jazz technique the world over. Armstrong placed the spotlight on improvisation and made it known as an innovation and extension of supreme musical skill.

Still greater was his public persona as an American popular music star famous for his singing, stage recording, and movies. Louis Armstrong introduced the world to the modern language of popular music from New Orleans. He is the father figure who captured, communicated, and defined America’s early popular music. Everyone, instrumentalists and singers alike, imitated Louis Armstrong. He was the first great projected image of American artistry in jazz and represents “forward thinking.” Armstrong is the undisputed great genius of American music.

Like Nashville for early rural roots music, vestiges of both ragtime and blues surfaced in New Orleans. Players like the famed Jelly Roll Morton saw ragtime as an influential technique and the blues as a foundational musical flavor. In Morton’s music, there is the great combination of at least three grand American popular music traditions—early jazz from New Orleans, blues, and ragtime—mixed with what he referred to as a “Latin-tinge.”

This mix came to be known as jazz. Jelly Roll Morton, who claimed to have invented jazz, actually grew up in New Orleans. He began playing piano at an early age. As a kid, he skipped school to play piano in the Crescent City’s Storyville district, where sailors, town folks, and visitors alike were entertained. Jelly Roll played ragtime, French quadrilles, and popular songs. Around 1904, Morton left New Orleans for musical work in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. He later expanded his tours to Memphis, St. Louis, and Kansas City, and even as far as Los Angeles—quite a trek to carry these traditions all over the country.

Because he began to create his own arrangements of these hybrid traditions, Jelly Roll Morton has come to be known as the “father of jazz composition.” Around 1922, Jelly Roll moved to the city of Chicago, at that time the new center of jazz.

His first recordings with ensembles and solo piano performances were made there in 1923, and by 1926 Morton was recording with his own group, the Red Hot Peppers, an eight-piece band organized for recording purposes and comprised of colleagues well versed in the New Orleans style and familiar with Morton's music. Jelly Roll Morton is one of the foundational artists of the American popular music style now inclusively and commonly known as jazz.

Modern Big Band

African American musician Fletcher Henderson (1897–1952) is credited with inventing the modern jazz orchestra. As he arranged his band to play entertainment venues in New York City during the early 1920s, Henderson created the modern big band model used by subsequent jazz orchestras. This arrangement included the separation of a band into sections of saxophones, horns, and drums, playing dance and entertainment music.

Through his work with Henderson's band, the great musician Coleman Hawkins (1904–1969) helped to establish the saxophone as a serious jazz instrument with the help of the band's great arranger, Don Redman (1900–1964). Henderson's orchestra now exemplified a mix of southern and northern musical styles and cultures brought together in most cosmopolitan American cities of the new century. The big band—now with its saxes, brass, arrangements, and improvisations—became a cemented American popular sound to represent cities and entertainment in music.

Moreover, in 1926, Louis Armstrong extended his innovative artistic voice with his recording of “Heebie Jeebies,” the first “jazz scat” record ever released.

This influenced everybody's musicality, including the art of the jazz solo and even a musician's playing posture. Armstrong's pianist friend Earl Hines adapted his ideas to his own instrument, becoming the first great piano soloist. This set the stage for the jazz orchestra in the 1920s and '30s to hire “hot” soloists like Armstrong and Coleman Hawkins to spark up the earlier polite social dancing that had been the norm of American entertainment tradition since the 1930s. As it developed, jazz was the “mainstreamed” American popular music until the advent of rock and roll.

New York

At the beginning of the 20th century, many young musicians—following Louis Armstrong’s lead—moved to New York, at that time the capital of modern American popular music. Just as New Orleans had been a seaport city that drew the world, New York became a modern city with a magnetic appeal. While cities like Chicago, St. Louis, and Los Angeles became thriving centers for American popular music, New York was known as “the Big Apple” for good reason: It was a big town made for those with big dreams. In the latter part of the 19th and early part of the 20th century, some estimated 14 million people immigrated to the United States from Europe. These populations, in conjunction with the mass of Black migrants moving from southern states to northern cities like New York and Chicago to look for work, account for the tremendous growth in urban areas. People moved to large cities and brought their music; in these new environments, they continued to make music influenced by their new surroundings. New York soon became a place to see a significant creation of modern American popular music, its artists, and industry.

The New York sound was comprised of the music of Tin Pan Alley, early Broadway, the collaborations of songwriter Eubie Blake and playwright Noble Sissle, and the performances of the James Reese Europe orchestra with dancers Vernon and Irene Castle. In the words of author F. Scott Fitzgerald, New York City truly typified the “Jazz Age,” an idea that was documented in his book of the same title from 1931: “It was an age of miracles, it was an age of art, it was an age of excess, and it was an age of satire.” It was also the nation’s first young people’s movement in America. Popular modern culture had begun and it was called the Jazz Age.

The 20th century sped up in all directions, and the sounds of ragtime and early jazz reflected this. Newspaper writers and social critics from many corners lamented the emergence of ragtime and jazz as embracing a “restless and reckless life, perceptible moral limitations.” The music was described as “low-class music” that encouraged “drinking and inappropriate dance and mingling among young men and women,” all of which posed a danger to the status quo.

By 1914, ragtime was America’s most popular music. Social dancing and music became very popular to young Americans. Irene and Vernon Castle were a popular American dance team who were often accompanied by James Reese Europe’s African American orchestra. Europe single-

handedly helped to expose the larger world to ragtime during World War I through his tours of Europe. The fox trot, a dance made famous through the collaboration between the Castles and Europe's band, might be seen as the event that paved the way for America's acceptance of ragtime, blues, and jazz as its most popular forms of music and dance. Dances, bands, and sheet music carried the new music.

The music and the dancing was a way to break from old culture, and this is the great sociocultural theme and formula of the innovation, transformation, individual identity, and creativity that are an inseparable part of American popular culture.

Jazz was first from New Orleans, folk and bluegrass traditions from rural southern communities, and now in the early 20th century forward, the music was coming from the big city sounds and styles of New York, Chicago, and later Detroit, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles.

American Tin Pan Alley

The Jazz Singer, the first full-length film that incorporated sound, was released in 1927, and serves as an early example of American popular culture at work. White actor Al Jolson appears in blackface in *The Jazz Singer*, singing jazz music and minstrel songs. His performance was widely embraced as the new typical style of American popular music.

The style shown in *The Jazz Singer* unfortunately harkens back to the old minstrel tradition as another version of disrespectful and hateful "humor" using stereotypes of Black life and culture—but that representation in music style was a music collection that represented a fusion of the best in American popular music that had come before. Airplane travel, movies, the rise of Picasso's artistic style, the new fast tempos of music and dances, the playing of ragtime and blues, and recorded music—these were all involved in shaping a new way of being, of expressing and interpreting modernity. Music was now "recordable," and this transformed the musical experience into a business, a national voice and product that could be heard from America all over the world. The singing, the songs, and the styles could be captured from local communities and shared throughout the world.

There was a huge move in the 1920s to celebrate the opening of the new era, and much of the new music of the 20th century was disseminated through the city of New York. This era is considered the start of the

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Great American Songbook, a musical canon that represents the American story. Through this idea, songwriters—such as Irving Berlin and George Gershwin—were celebrated alongside musicians as spokespeople for the American experience.

Various folk tunes were established in New York, brought by the Irish, Jewish, German, and English newcomers. These 20th-century immigrants, like earlier settlers, also brought their musical traditions with them. These folks passed through Ellis Island, New York, to become American citizens in the first part of the new 20th century.

New York's Tin Pan Alley was the new music publishing headquarters where, since the 1890s, there were many stores and music publishing offices that sprang up around West 12th and 6th Avenue. There was such a business and busyness of sounds, and piano playing of songs, ragtime piano, and singing, that all the noise, they said, sounded like lots of tin pan cans banging all together at the same time—thus the name, Tin Pan Alley.

Many ethnic, Jewish, and African American songwriters, publishers, singers, and pianists were now able to sell their music for a growing national interest in American popular culture. One of the ways a family showed their “arrived-ness” in modern America was to have piano at home. Radios and sheet music were purchased too and were the way early American popular music was heard and practiced by millions of people.

New York songwriting as a music practice became an American way for people to become known, make money, and get their music out there. The recording industry grew from taverns, performers, and juke joints to radio programs, instrumentalists and early jazz performers, sheet music, and now recordings, which produced the formulas for what became American popular music.

In addition, there were the urban talent centers such as the Apollo in neighborhoods like Harlem, New York. The kinds of musical activities that developed in these local venues were soon to shape what would become modern popular music culture too. The story of American popular music is, in part, the story of how Americans balanced religious and secular life, race and culture, gender roles and sexuality, rural and city, and identity and mixed global/cultural worldviews. Music accompanied and shaped all these discussions too about generational and stylistic divides, and in no place is this discussion more accelerated or visible than in popular music.

The truth of America's struggle and celebration of its beliefs and value systems are found in American music. As songwriter Irving Berlin claimed, jazz (and popular music) represented the "snap and the speed of modern American life."

A Summation at This Point

Music comes from local communities where their innovative expressions lift up unique artistry that inspires, shapes, and changes our society and the world. There are several historical groupings that represent the most visited and recognized mainstream expressions of American popular music in the 20th and 21st centuries thus far. From these groupings have come the artistry and movements most associated with the roots and routes of contemporary popular music culture. The first period includes:

- American roots music
- The spirituals
- Blues
- Gospel music (African American church)
- Jazz artistry

and the next grouping becomes

- R&B and early rock and roll
- Latin American styles and artistry
- Soul
- Funk
- Reggae
- Urban contemporary
- American mainstream popular music.

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As American music began to be marketed and cemented into categories of styles and examples, it simultaneously grew into various types of artistry from this general overview of these modern mainstream style groupings.

Roots Music

The discussion of the history of American music begins with an understanding of the “before,” the creative ideas, traditions, and cultural contexts of world culture that laid the groundwork. The traditions in these early years that were most visible and that shaped the grounding for jazz were the early colonial English ballads and hymns, European and American marches, West African music traditions, Spanish and Caribbean songs, American spirituals, and minstrel music—from Grand Ole Opry, old-time roots music, country, bluegrass (Jimmie Rodgers, the Carter family to Earl Scruggs), and rural folk to social protest traditions (Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez).

The first early expressions of American popular music—including folk, old-time music, country, blues, gospel, and many others—are often referred to as American roots music. This music stems originally from a mixing of North American music carved out of country folk tunes from England, Scotland, and Ireland, and African culture songs. This music was the voice of the American common man and woman, the everyday singing of community members. Early (1920s–30s) radio programs, like the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, provided an important link between rural, country folk music and the growing public demand for these artists and styles. This music helped people in pre-media days remember our national history and keep conscious through song everyday American music traditions and values. Essentially, the songs chronicle common issues that were largely sung and they played acoustic music (that is, there was no electricity involved). American roots music was the unique musicality born of conversations between neighbors, families, and friends.

The Spirituals

The spirituals are the first original song tradition in our popular music culture created on American soil, then exported through the Fisk Jubilee singers and others to the world. Between approximately 1690 and 1890,

Africans enslaved in America developed a repertoire of thousands of sacred songs that are now referred to as the spirituals. These songs grew out of the musical practices called field hollers and work songs that were developed during slavery. The spirituals are evidence of the literary wit and personal and communal resolve as expressed in these songs. Some of the recurrent themes in the spirituals include liberation and freedom, divine justice, life in exile, faith during times of adversity and suffering, God and Jesus as friend and salvation, and a clear—albeit coded—articulation of antislavery sentiment.

Slaves used singing and music making as a way to escape their harsh working conditions and inhumane treatment.

Blues

The blues is the mother tongue of American popular music that arose in the 20th century. The blues is a language created by African American musicians, singers, and storytellers who roamed the South in the late 19th century, after slavery was abolished. As they searched for loved ones from whom slavery had separated, as they searched for work, and as they built their families and established new roots, they developed an aesthetic identity that represented freedom and a way to escape the hardships of their new modern life. The blues were one of the first secular (nonreligious) styles of Black music to grow out of the spirituals. Like the spirituals, the blues are a musical form and style of playing that evolved from the antebellum musical practice of field hollers and work songs, highly improvisatory folk music in which mythical heroes such as John Henry and Stagger Lee were celebrated.

Former slaves created the blues to accompany their new lives, in which they searched for jobs, established families, and put down roots of their own choosing. The men who carried these songs on their journeys were known as the “Bluesmen.” “Bluesmen jobs” at the turn of the 20th century included work building dams and levees, sharecropping, construction, timber cutting, railroad track laying, and carrying crops to market. The blues are sung poetry concerned with common experience. Early blues instrumentation included the diddley-bow (one string attached to the side of a house or a board), banjo, and guitar, and later incorporated piano, horns, and eventually full musical ensembles. This was rural Black folk music.

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Gospel

Black gospel music in the mid-20th century can be seen as yet another outcome of the Great Migration, incorporating Black rural and popular styles as well as Black cultural interests and musical styles but heard primarily in African American churches. Gospel music became a powerful social-cultural tool within African American communities and was a major sound and style that impacted modern popular music. Many of the major singers—like Aretha Franklin, Whitney Houston, the Isley Brothers, and Sam Cooke, all voices that are staple sounds grounding rock and roll and soul—were all singers from the Black church. Gospel music continued its evolution like the blues but via church musicians, many of whom were grounded in blues musical technique, which they brought to bear on their performances in the church, creating a hybrid of styles and musical languages. Gospel is a religious music that is the popular and commercial continuation of the older Black spiritual singing tradition. Unlike other American sacred music, gospel is very closely aligned, developmentally, with blues and jazz, which is the reason for its discussion here in relation to the development of mainstream popular music culture and styles. All of the “core” pop music of blues, jazz, and rock and roll grew out of and was aligned with the Black church, so gospel music is often called the spiritual cousin to jazz and rock and roll. Black southern masses in the 1920s, '30s, and '40s moved into urban areas, and new cultural forms evolved to accommodate that move. One of these was gospel music. Equally important to this process were gospel radio programs.

These shows, like the bluegrass and blues radio shows, had national sponsors and organized events such as “Gospel Clubs,” after-church nightspots where listeners could go and hear gospel music. Radio programs like WLIB’s “Gospel Train,” out of New York City, functioned again in the same way that the Grand Ole Opry program did, and played a major role in the growth of gospel music nationally.

Swing, Jazz, and Popular Culture

Jazz is America “growing up” and becoming modernized. During this period, jazz became its own culturally coded music with dance, images, and personalities. It is cemented in cosmopolitan and modern America in the 20th century, and flowered in northern cities like New York, Chicago,

St. Louis, Kansas City, and Washington, D.C., as swing, jazz, and popular culture. Duke Ellington's hit "It Don't Mean a Thing, if It Ain't Got That Swing" was the mantra of the era—everything had to swing. The beboppers (1945–1955) were the younger, next generation of musicians to define jazz's first musical revolution from within the music. *Free Jazz* (1961) was the name of both Ornette Coleman's recording on Columbia Records and the musical movement and artistry that marked another musical and cultural revolution inside jazz. Action jazz describes a more radical face of an edgy and more opened Coltrane, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, Cecil Taylor, Albert Ayer, and more. This radical approach demanded that listeners be in the world in different ways, and that music sounded the argument clearer in title and tone than ever before. Free jazz also rang out with broader implications to the larger world of the 1960s and was used with various elements of popular music, R&B, and rock and roll.

Latin American Styles and Artistry

Latin American music and artistry has been one of the critical stylistic components of modern popular music. Latin American music incorporates the richest cross-cultural blending from South and North America, to Caribbean island music culture in modern times. Salsa, Afro-Cuban, and bossa nova to timba and reggaeton all are part of the American popular music mix. The jazz mix of Cuban music, with collaborations of Cuban drummer-dancer-songwriter Chano Pozo and American jazz great Dizzy Gillespie, created *manteca*, a jazz staple and formed Afro-Cuba jazz. All this music comes primarily from the traditions of peoples and cultures that include the Caribbean islands, Cuba, Central and South America, Mexico, and Puerto Rico. These music and cultural forms contain a mixture of Spanish, African, Portuguese, and Native Indian and European influences and practices. Religious practices too are a part of this mix with European Christianity, Islam, and African and native island Indians' religious practices, rituals, and symbols.

The dominating presence of the African Moorish traditions is huge; mixtures with Spanish culture, European colonization, and the immense slave trade of African populations from 1550 to 1880 were the critical cultural factors that led to the creation of Latin American music traditions popular in American music culture today. The most distinctive

and influential parts of the music have come to be the Spanish song and melodic dance forms, and African rhythmic, dance, and melodic forms, all formed by driving Afro-Caribbean rhythms, where dance, song, and melody are intricately locked together, equally. A principal rhythmic concept, or pattern, found throughout is “the clave,” one of the basic rhythms patterns, and heard in an instrument of two small wooden sticks that sound and hold the pattern in performances. Most of the countries and islands in the Caribbean developed their own distinctive contributions to the music we now know as Latin American music. Many times all lumped incorrectly as “Latin jazz,” these independent forms such as habaneras, tangos, rumba, *son cubano*, mambo, cha-cha, and bolero, all have been an influence on and part of the equation of American music, due to the constant, continued mix of these cultural groups in the Caribbean and North and South America and Mexico. This syncretic blend was inevitable. The advent of TV and movies with Desi Arnaz, *West Side Story*, and Richie Havens, Antônio Carlos Jobim, José Feliciano, Chick Corea, Santana, Gloria Estefan, and Ricky Martin—all are great artists influenced by Latin and South American traditions.

American Mainstream Popular Music Traditions Merge

Mainstream Modern Popular Music

Before MTV and the Internet, radio was the great crossroads from which most music in American culture was disseminated. There was always a correlation between all these styles, names, and record categories for the general buying public, defined by the record companies, radio stations, record reporting magazines, and the stores that stocked the records and artist-related products being sold. The big bang moment—when mainstream popular culture began to incorporate every style that had come together from the '30s through the '50s—was the emergence of American mainstream rock and roll music in the early 1960s.

Early Rhythm and Blues

Louis Jordan's music in the late 1940s marked the beginning of R&B as a postwar next development. By 1949, a secular popular blues tradition and category was noted by *Billboard* magazine as Rhythm and Blues.

Early Rock and Roll

Rock and roll was a term coined by a White DJ Alan Freed and represents the awakening and attraction of White America in the 1950s to Black popular dance music. Thus, Little Richard (b. 1935), Chuck Berry (b. 1926), and Fats Domino (b. 1929) became huge crossover acts. This combination of blues, country, jazz, electronics, and popular youth styles—as exemplified by artists such as Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, Little Richard, Buddy Holly, Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, Bill Haley, and Elvis Presley—created a national mainstream thirst and industry called modern American popular music. Elvis Presley’s first recorded song, again following an established American pattern of communities borrowing and remaking from a variety of musical sources, was a cover version of blues singer Arthur Crudup’s “That’s All Right Mama” in 1954.

This early fusion of country and blues styles, called rockabilly, was a part of Elvis’s early recordings of blues and prompted the acceptance that is believed to be the great catalyst for mainstream or modern rock and roll and pop music. Also of note was Chuck Berry’s “Maybellene.” These kinds of musical innovations helped to define new sounds and imagery for a post–World War II teenage market. The innovations of technology and growth in popular culture go right along with this. The emergence of TV, the 45-rpm record format, transistor radios, car radios, new teenage patterns of dating, worshiping teen idols, and dancing all combined with similar patterns in music, dance, and youth culture to define American tastes.

It is in discussing certain American cities and sounds—such as Nashville, Memphis, Muscle Shoals, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Detroit—that we really hit the bull’s-eye of American popular music.

These places valued their people, stories, and musicians, and the brew of these values is quintessentially American: good music and musicians, great stories about people and values, great beats. The American popular sound is a mix of culture, styles, regions, and experimentation with songs, technology, hooks and riffs, beats, human vocal singing, dance, and great verse in stories. That’s what American popular music is.

And it is this point in the late 1950s and 1960s that becomes the watershed moment, the most fruitful time when all these come together as a recognized, accepted sound, a way to be, the forms, styles, and artistry of mainstream popular music.

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Soul Music

In 1969 *Billboard* magazine revamped its categories and instituted Soul as the overall category for Black popular music. As musicologist Portia Maultsby pointed out,

The Soul era was a productive period for Black Americans. Group cohesion, political activism and community self-help programs were responses to the messages of soul singers and leaders of the Black Power movement. The music created by Blacks and for Blacks during this era communicated a general philosophy of refusal to accept the undesirable and a determination to create a better future.

Soul music, particularly between 1965 and 1975, again represented many things, but soul music can be thought of as the Black popular music that accompanied the civil rights years in America.

“A Change Is Gonna Come” (Sam Cooke/Otis Redding, 1965)

“Say It Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud” (James Brown, 1967)

“Respect” (Aretha Franklin, 1967)

“Choice of Colors” (Impressions, 1969)

“To Be Young, Gifted and Black” (Nina Simone, 1969)

“Ain’t No Stopping Us Now” (McFadden and Whitehead, 1979)

Bob Marley, a central figure in the global rise of the Jamaican music, reggae, was moved by the social-political infused music he experienced coming out of 1960s Black, urban, social-protest soul. He should be counted in as “global soul.” The period of the 1960s, ’70s, ’80s, and early 1990s is the golden period of relevance. The earlier traditional generation passed on and pushed an “aspirational mind-set” to look beyond the present toward a quality life, hard work, and accomplishment that buffered against disappointment and failure, and shut doors. The songs were high inspiration and prescriptive for living. And they were imbued with community values. Song was a part of the social medicine.

Some of the themes that are prevalent and consistent with the values of the times that are transmitted in Black popular culture are: social protest, community (love), political activism, social accountability, self and cultural pride, family/love, Black power/Black nationality innovative artistry, international recognition and appreciation, and the power of a

relevant social dynamic. In addition to the numerous examples above, the soul music period included artists such as James Brown, Aretha Franklin, Earth, Wind and Fire, Al Green, the Supremes, the Jackson Five, and early Parliament-Funkadelic.

More Mainstream

Most notable was the social transformation that was taking place in the music, or perhaps because of it: Black and White young Americans were dancing, singing, and listening to the same music, rock and roll, in integrated ways. The American popular music industry, begun in the 1960s and developed over the next 40 years, continues to set the standard for popular music around the world. This moment was highlighted during the “British invasion” of 1964, when U.K. pop sensations the Beatles landed in America to find 50,000 screaming kids awaiting their arrival. The Beatles were a group that represented the new kingpins of music and youth appreciation. This British invasion was visible in popular culture in the 1960s as artists like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones were making \$100,000 per night, and grossing \$17 million a year in records sales. The gap between jazz and popular music audiences, as well as the generation gap, got defined in a new way through the emergence of modern rock and roll, marking a new era in American and popular music internationally. Tastes had changed.

This was the end of the jazz/swing band era, and popular singing took center stage as mainstream teen idols defined the new formulas for popular artistry. Singing and the post-World War II sentiments of love, youth, and Americana were the central themes that began to drive the American popular music industry and imagination. And, of course, the next wave of this critique/protest is punk and rap, both of which emerged in the mid-1970s. And while this seems obvious, what’s of note is that there continue to be revolutions, new eruptions of social dissatisfaction; inevitably, industry co-opts that energy, markets it, and then there are more reactions against that, a new form arises, and it continues, mechanized by musicians and artists.

Urban Contemporary

The powerful forms of traditional Black popular forms continued through the 1950s through 2010 and beyond, and exist as soul/funk (James

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Brown, Aretha Franklin, George Clinton) and urban contemporary (Whitney Houston, D'Angelo, hip-hop). These impulses reached out to influence Black culture communities throughout the diaspora.

Hip-hop, or rap music, began commercially with the 1979 release of the Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight." Rap, however, predated this influential song; the Jamaican tradition of sound clashes, in which rival mobile sound systems, operated by community DJs, battled for the hearts and minds of listeners and dancers at neighborhood block parties around Kingston, Jamaica, established the DJ as a musician, and the turntable as his instrument.

Transferred to the United States when many Jamaicans immigrated to the East Coast, this DJ tradition blended with young street poets expressing themselves artistically in a Black style. This public arena and performance stage served as a method of claiming authenticity and reflecting upon and discussing their "urban identity." There are many reasons to investigate hip-hop and to link rap and see this as one of the most vibrant and meaningful musical expressions in contemporary American musical culture.

Besides the fact that it is today one of the most provocative and popular musical art forms of the last four decades, the real meaning of this new cultural activity is found among those for whom the operative meanings in language, dance, attitude, dress, poetry, and art are created and worked out daily in local communities. Rap music and culture in the 1980s and '90s works in the same ways, sociologically, as rock and roll during the hippie generation of the 1960s and punk rock as well in England during the 1970s.

Building on the foundations laid by celebrated groups like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, American rock and roll musicians and what began to be known as "mainstream pop" converged throughout the later 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, allowing a continuation of new and exciting forms of music that paid homage to blues and roots music. From Bon Jovi, Aerosmith, and Z. Z. Top to Michael Jackson, Madonna, Kurt Cobain, and Beyoncé—artists continue to mine some of the earliest American styles while presenting them in a wholly modern and electric setting.

To this day, American musicians continue to refine American popular music for international listeners.

Telling the Popular Music Story in Songs: Chronology of American Pop/Rock Hits, Albums 1949–2013

Yet another way to follow the development of both American popular music and our social/cultural history is to follow the journey of artists and their recorded songs.

This list is helpful in seeing the growth and variety of popular music artistry and its connections with the social/political climate of each era and linkages between the times, songs, and themes carried in music.

The 1950s typify an explosion in mainstream popular music, a post-war rising of a new youth generation finding its own music, rock and roll.

“Professor Longhair and His New Orleans Boys,” *Mardis Gras*, 1949

“Rocket 88,” Jackie Brenston and His Delta Cats, 1951

“Hound Dog,” Big Mama Thornton, 1953

“Tutti Frutti,” “Long Tall Sally,” “Rip It Up,” Little Richard, 1955, 1956, 1957

“Rock around the Clock,” Bill Haley, 1956

“Maybellene,” Chuck Berry

“Heartbreak Hotel,” “Don’t Be Cruel,” “Hound Dog,” Elvis Presley, 1956

“Blue Suede Shoes,” Carl Perkins

“The Great Pretender,” The Platters

American Bandstand begins

“Calypso,” Harry Belafonte

Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, and Elvis Presley jam together at Sun Records Studios in Memphis

“That’ll Be the Day,” Buddy Holly, 1957

“All Shook Up,” Elvis Presley

“Banana Boat,” Harry Belafonte

“You Send Me,” Sam Cooke, 1957

“School Day,” Chuck Berry

“Johnny B Goode,” Chuck Berry, 1958

“Come Fly with Me,” Frank Sinatra

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- “Warm,” Johnny Mathis
- “Patricia,” Perez Prado and His Orchestra
- “Venus,” Frankie Avalon, 1959
- “Shop Around,” The Miracles, 1960

The 1960s typified the new generation using its music to say what it wanted to say to critique and question, and that music is an all-encompassing voice of the generation.

- “The Twist,” Chubby Checker, 1960
- “Will You Love Me Tomorrow?” The Shirelles, 1961
- “I Can’t Stop Loving You,” Ray Charles, 1962
- “Ramblin’ Rose,” Nat King Cole
- “Love Me Do,” Beatles, 1962
- “Fingertips,” “Please Me Please Me,” Stevie Wonder, 1963
- “It’s My Party,” Leslie Gore
- “Blowin’ in the Wind,” Peter, Paul, and Mary
- “Hello Dolly,” Louis Armstrong, 1964
- “Can I Get a Witness,” Marvin Gaye
- “Baby Love,” Supremes, 1964
- “Oh Pretty Woman,” Roy Orbison
- “She Loves You,” “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” Beatles
- “My Guy,” Mary Wells
- “You’ve Lost the Lovin’ Feeling,” The Righteous Brothers, 1965
- Otis Blue* album, Otis Redding, 1965
- “Satisfaction,” Rolling Stones, 1965
- “Stop in the Name of Love,” Supremes, 1965
- “Mr. Tambourine Man,” The Byrds
- Pet Sounds* album, The Beach Boys, 1966
- “I Got You,” James Brown
- “California Dreamin’,” Mamas and the Papas
- “Light My Fire,” The Doors, 1967
- “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band,” The Beatles
- “Respect,” Aretha Franklin
- Are You Experienced*, Jimi Hendrix, 1967
- “Soul Man,” Sam and Dave
- “Hey Jude,” The Beatles, 1968

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- “The Dock of the Bay,” Otis Redding
- “Dance to the Music,” Sly and the Family Stone, 1968
- Led Zeppelin*, Led Zeppelin, 1969
- “Aquarius/Let the Sunshine,” The Fifth Dimension
- “I Heard It through the Grapevine,” Marvin Gaye

The 1970s show a shift in societal protest to societal rebuilding and the stark realities of that new social world. Popular music in the '70s expressed what that world looked like, and used the creativity and new electronic recording technologies to experiment and recast music in new ways. There was a sense that then was the time to reaccess responsibility, take charge, and express bold new styles and freedoms. The '70s saw the emergence of three new popular music trends: disco, hip-hop, and punk, and all these approaches and ideas were embodied in the music.

1970

- “Bridge over Troubled Water,” Simon and Garfunkel
- “American Woman,” Guess Who
- “ABC,” Jackson Five
- “War,” Edwin Starr
- “Ball of Confusion,” Temptations
- “Let It Be,” The Beatles
- “Close to You,” Carpenters
- “Your Song,” Elton John
- “Get Up (I Feel Like Being a) Sex Machine,” James Brown
- “Fire and Rain,” James Taylor
- “Paranoid,” Black Sabbath

1971

- “Stairway to Heaven,” Led Zeppelin
- “Imagine,” John Lennon
- “What’s Going On,” Marvin Gaye
- “Let’s Stay Together,” Al Green
- “American Pie,” Don McLean
- “Brown Sugar,” The Rolling Stones

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“Just My Imagination,” The Temptations
“Family Affair,” Sly and the Family Stone

1972

“Smoke on the Water,” Deep Purple
“Lean on Me,” Bill Withers
“Heart of Gold,” Neil Young
“You Are the Sunshine of My Life,” Stevie Wonder
“I’ll Take You There,” The Staple Singers

1973

“Let’s Get It On,” Marvin Gaye
“Midnight Train to Georgia,” Gladys Knight and the Pips
“Living for the City,” Stevie Wonder
“Money,” Pink Floyd
“Piano Man,” Billy Joel
“Killing Me Softly with His Song,” Roberta Flack
“Goodbye Yellow Brick Road,” Elton John

1974

“No Woman, No Cry,” Bob Marley and the Wailers
“Sweet Home Alabama,” Lynyrd Skynyrd
“Lady Marmalade,” Patti LaBelle
“Help Me,” Joni Mitchell
“Tell Me Something Good,” Rufus

1975

“Born to Run,” Bruce Springsteen
“Bohemian Rhapsody,” Queen
“Shining Star,” Earth, Wind and Fire
“Walk This Way,” Aerosmith
“Tangled Up in Blue,” Bob Dylan
“One of These Nights,” Eagles
“Low Rider,” War

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1976

- “More Than a Feeling,” Boston
- “Anarchy in the UK,” The Sex Pistols
- “Night Moves,” Bob Seger
- “Blitzkrieg Bop,” The Ramones

1977

- “Staying Alive,” The Bee Gees
- “We Will Rock You/We Are the Champions,” Queen
- “Heroes,” David Bowie
- “Best of My Love,” The Emotions
- “God Save the Queen,” The Sex Pistols
- “Brick House,” The Commodores
- “Dreams,” Fleetwood Mac

1978

- “I Will Survive,” Gloria Gaynor
- “Roxanne,” The Police
- “One Nation under a Groove,” Funkadelic
- “Le Freak,” Chic
- “Old Time Rock and Roll,” Bob Seger

1979

- “Rapper’s Delight,” The Sugarhill Gang
- “Good Times,” Chic
- “Don’t Stop ‘til You Get Enough,” Michael Jackson
- “We Are Family,” Sister Sledge
- “Hot Stuff,” Donna Summer
- “Message in a Bottle,” The Police

The music of the 1980s has typically been seen and demonized as “big business,” controlled and dismissed as only a preoccupation with personal pursuit and attainment, perhaps, social complacency and arriving. Being

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famous, “Dancing the Night Away,” being material, “Bad” or “Rockin’ in the Free World” were a part of the popular music formula.

1980

“Call Me,” Blondie
“Celebration,” Kool and The Gang
“Another One Bites the Dust,” Queen
“Upside Down,” Diana Ross
“Fame,” Irene Cara

1981

“I Love Rock n Roll,” Joan Jett & the Blackhearts
“Super Freak Part I,” Rick James
“Start Me Up,” Rolling Stones
“Bette Davis Eyes,” Kim Carnes
“Endless Love,” Diana Ross and Lionel Richie
“Physical,” Olivia Newton-John

1982

“Billie Jean,” Michael Jackson
“The Message,” Grandmaster Flash and the Furious 5
“Beat It,” Michael Jackson
“Sexual Healing,” Marvin Gaye
“Planet Rock,” Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force
“Little Red Corvette,” Prince
“Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This),” Eurythmics
“1999,” Prince
“Rock the Casbah,” The Clash

1983

“Every Breath You Take,” Police
“Jump,” Van Halen
“Girls Just Want to Have Fun,” Cyndi Lauper
“Flashdance What a Feeling,” Irene Cara

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“Holiday,” Madonna
“Time after Time,” Cyndi Lauper
“All Night Long (All Night),” Lionel Richie
“Rockit,” Herbie Hancock
“Let’s Dance,” David Bowie

1984

“When Doves Cry,” Prince
“What’s Love Got to Do with It?” Tina Turner
“Born in the U.S.A.,” Bruce Springsteen
“Purple Rain,” Prince
“Careless Whisper,” Wham! featuring George Michael
“Pride (in the Name of Love),” U2

1985

“Material Girl,” Madonna
“Addicted to Love,” Robert Palmer
“We Are the World,” U.S.A. for Africa
“Word Up!” Cameo
“How Will I Know?” Whitney Houston
“The Power of Love,” Huey Lewis and the News

1986

“Walk This Way,” Run-DMC
“(You Gotta) Fight for Your Right (to Party!),” Beastie Boys
“Nasty,” Janet Jackson
“Sledgehammer,” Peter Gabriel
“Livin’ on a Prayer,” Bon Jovi
“Higher Love,” Steve Winwood
“Push It,” Salt-N-Pepa

1987

“Sweet Child o’ Mine,” Guns n’ Roses
“I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For,” U2

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“Faith,” George Michael
“Bad,” Michael Jackson
“Welcome to the Jungle,” Guns n’ Roses
“Sign o’ the Times,” Prince

1988

“Fast Car,” Tracy Chapman
“F*** the Police,” N.W.A
“My Prerogative,” Bobby Brown
“Straight Up,” Paula Abdul
“Parents Just Don’t Understand,” DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince

1989

“Fight the Power,” Public Enemy
“Rockin’ in the Free World,” Neil Young
“Love Shack,” B-52s
“Me, Myself, and I,” De La Soul
“Bust a Move,” Young MC

There is an air in the 1990s of a now-hardened reality, an independence exhibited that the broken world owes us nothing, because we can make our own worlds, like a survivor, a renegade, a gangsta. My “new name” I can create, regardless of this world. The pursuit of new ways to make a success is the high marks of making it. “My new name is” embodies a new personal reconstructed identity that becomes the benchmark.

1990

“Nothing Compares 2 U,” Sinéad O’Connor
“Mama Said Knock You Out,” LL Cool J
“Vogue,” Madonna
“U Can’t Touch This,” MC Hammer
“Unbelievable,” EMF
“Vision of Love,” Mariah Carey

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1991

“Smells Like Teen Spirit,” Nirvana
“Losing My Religion,” R.E.
“O.P.P.,” Naughty by Nature
“November Rain,” Guns n’ Roses
“Enter Sandman,” Metallica

1992

“Nuthin’ but a ‘G’ Thang,” Dr. Dre
“Tears in Heaven,” Eric Clapton
“Tennessee,” Arrested Development
“Killing in the Name,” Rage against the Machine
“Everybody Hurts,” R.E.M.
“Real Love,” Mary J. Blige

1993

“Loser,” Beck
“All I Wanna Do,” Sheryl Crow
“Today,” Smashing Pumpkins
“Whatta Man,” Salt ‘n’ Pepa with En Vogue
“All Apologies,” Nirvana
“That’s the Way Love Goes,” Janet Jackson
“Gin & Juice,” Snoop Doggy Dogg
“Are You Gonna Go My Way,” Lenny Kravitz

1994

“Waterfalls,” TLC
“Closer,” Nine Inch Nails
“Sabotage,” Beastie Boys
“Regulate,” Warren G
“Longview,” Green Day

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1995

“Gangsta’s Paradise,” Coolio
“1979,” Smashing Pumpkins
“Bullet with Butterfly Wings,” Smashing Pumpkins
“The Crossroads,” Bone Thugs ‘n’ Harmony
“Ironic,” Alanis Morissette
“Dear Mama,” 2Pac

1996

“No Diggity,” BLACKstreet
“Don’t Speak,” No Doubt
“Killing Me Softly,” The Fugees
“I Believe I Can Fly,” R. Kelly
“Crash into Me,” Dave Matthews Band
“Bulls on Parade,” Rage against the Machine

1997

“Mo Money Mo Problems,” Notorious B.I.G.
“Paranoid Android,” Radiohead
“Good Riddance (Time of Your Life),” Green Day
“I’ll Be Missing You,” Puff Daddy
“Everlong,” Foo Fighters
“On and On,” Erykah Badu

1998

“Doo Wop (That Thing),” Lauryn Hill
“Hard Knock Life,” Jay-Z
“Iris,” Goo Goo
“The Boy Is Mine,” Brandy and Monica
“Bawitdaba,” Kid Rock
“Freak on a Leash,” Korn
“Rosa Parks,” OutKast

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1999

- “Smooth,” Santana and Rob Thomas
- “My Name Is,” Eminem
- “No Scrubs,” TLC
- “All the Small Things,” Blink 182
- “I Try,” Macy Gray
- “Say My Name,” Destiny’s Child

The decade of the 2000s was typified by the continued idea of success but through innovation and unprecedented access and use of information technology, the Internet, and new electronic delivery and dissemination systems. Branding and creative marketing becomes the driving ideas: How many ways can I reinvent myself in new ways simultaneously and still control it? The music highlighted lots of crossover features or industry partnering as artists appeared on each other’s hit singles.

2000

- “Beautiful Day,” U2
- “Stan,” Eminem
- “Try Again,” Aaliyah
- “B.O.B. (Bombs over Baghdad),” OutKast
- “In the End,” Linkin Park
- “Music,” Madonna

2001

- “Last Nite,” The Strokes
- “Get Ur Freak On,” Missy Elliott
- “Fallin’,” Alicia Keys
- “Fell in Love with a Girl,” The White Stripes
- “Family Affair,” Mary J. Blige
- “Survivor,” Destiny’s Child
- “Izzo (H.O.V.A.),” Jay-Z

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2002

“Lose Yourself,” Eminem
“Clocks,” Coldplay
“The Seed (2.0),” The Roots
“Work It,” Missy Elliot
“Made You Look,” Nas

2003

“Hey Ya!” OutKast
“Crazy in Love,” Beyoncé
“Jesus Walks,” Kanye West
“In Da Club,” 50 Cent
“99 Problems,” Jay-Z
“Where Is the Love,” Black Eyed Peas

2004

“Yeah!” Usher, featuring Lil’ Jon and Ludacris
“Boulevard of Broken Dreams,” Green Day
“Toxic,” Britney Spears
“Drop It Like It’s Hot,” Snoop Dogg, featuring Pharrell

2005

“Gold Digger,” Kanye West
“We Belong Together,” Mariah Carey
“Hate It or Love It,” The Game, featuring 50 Cent
“Stay Fly,” Three 6 Mafia
“Do You Want To,” Franz Ferdinand
“Check on It,” Beyoncé, featuring Slim Thug

2006

“Crazy,” Gnarls Barkley
“Rehab,” Amy Winehouse
“SexyBack,” Justin Timberlake

A PROGRESSIVE VIEW OF AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC HISTORY

“What You Know,” T. I.
“Irreplaceable,” Beyoncé
“Hips Don’t Lie,” Shakira
“Dani California,” Red Hot Chili Peppers

2007

“Umbrella,” Rihanna, featuring Jay-Z
“Low,” Flo Rida
“No One,” Alicia Keys
“Stronger,” Kanye West
“D.A.N.C.E.,” Justice
“Good Life,” Kanye West, featuring T. Pain
“Crank That,” Soulja Boy Tell

2008

“Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It),” Beyoncé Knowles
“Just Dance,” Lady Gaga
“I’m Yours,” Jason Mraz
“Disturbia,” Rihanna

2009

“I Gotta Feeling,” Black Eyed Peas
“Empire State of Mind,” Jay-Z, featuring Alicia Keys
“New Divide,” Linkin’ Park
“Know Your Enemy,” Green Day

2010

“California Gurls,” Katy Perry, featuring Snoop Dogg
“Airplanes,” B.O.B.
“Love the Way You Lie,” Eminem, featuring Rihanna
“Find Your Love,” Drake
“OMG,” Usher, featuring Will.i.am.
“Your Love Is My Drug,” Keisha

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2011

“Born This Way,” Lady GaGa
“E.T.,” Katy Perry and Kanye West
“S&M,” Rihanna
“On the Floor,” Jennifer Lopez, featuring Pitbull
“Give Me Everything,” Pitbull, featuring Ne-Yo
“Till the World Ends,” Britney Spears

2012

“Die Young,” Keisha
“SkyFall,” Adele
“Locked Out of Heaven,” Bruno Mars
“We Are Never Getting Back Together,” Taylor Swift
“Boyfriend,” Justin Bieber
“Diamonds,” Rihanna
“One More Night,” Maroon Five

2013

“Blurred Lines,” Robin Thicke
“Get Lucky,” Draft Punk
“We Own It,” 2 Chainz, Wiz Khalifa
“Just Give Me a Reason,” Pink

Conclusions

Today, beyond 2014, much has changed and has blossomed through the earlier categories that held to the traditional definitions of blues, jazz, country, and rock and roll. Artists today have multi-tiered agreements. These alone shape how artists today write, perform, produce, and market their product. We can also include the multimillion-dollar corporations these artists run, in addition to magazines—for example, Quincy Jones and Vibe, TV production companies, perfumes, a credit card, and watches. Today there is total industry crossover in 21st-century music art. Almost 100 years after Mamie Smith’s 1920 hit “Crazy Blues,” it can

probably be shown that these artists generate more revenue from the sale of their music than any other living artists in the world.

American popular music forms have, since the early days, exploded into a multibillion-dollar industry mixing and mangling love stories, interpersonal exploration, art, social protest themes, and entertainment fantasy, which have all become synonymous with the idea of American popular culture. If there is one to be found, this music is the true melting pot of American culture. Black—blues, jazz, gospel, White—Anglo ballad forms, European—classical music, and Latin and Caribbean—sensibilities, all carried by the expressive rhythmic fervor of American music within a popular projection is the total sum of American popular music. A folk formula might look something like this: Folk traditions from the South in Mississippi move to Chicago and elsewhere where musicians settle; White southerners cultivating Anglo ballads mix with southern spirituals and blues (country and western) and the result is American popular music. This connection, this living in the expression of American popular music sentiment, reminds us that this is an important transformative place. Music making in the 21st century is connected to an enormous amount of image, message, music, and value capital. This changes the meaning and the value, the process of artistry, and so much of our social transformation, and it raises important questions about the real meaning and consequences of this more impactful, creative activity in popular music/culture consumption in our culture. American popular music is the great treasure that we have given to the global community, and everyone in America should have the opportunity to learn from its music, artists, and social movements and be enriched by all it has brought to the world.

The history of popular music is wide. But there are countless examples of artistry that point to solid cases of innovations, community, and culture-based expressions that come from people's living experiences. The interpretation of those movements must come through the lens of the dynamic views of sociology, philosophical approaches, the spiritual and cultural understanding of the music and times, and the periods that gave rise to these forms of expressions. The technologies that shape the music are critical too. And last and most important is looking at the record of how the people reached, cared for, rejected, or were made empowered by these expressions that gave identity or raised a place for ideas, feelings, and understandings of true living that were sung or played in these sounds and music.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AMERICAN MAVERICKS

Interview

In an NPR interview, I suggested that the sharing by experimenting musicians has been a natural part of the American experiment in contemporary music culture since the 1890s. NPR reporter Alan Baker conducted the interview with me.

Bill Banfield: What I think we're talking about is tracking the development of orchestrated or enlarged jazz or Black music forms, from spirituals to blues to rag to the concert things we see now in these larger orchestra pieces that utilize jazz practice tradition and are heard in larger forms and ensembles. This notion of orchestrated jazz has an incredible and wonderful history, so by the time James P. Johnson is doing his piano and clarinet concertos—and we're familiar with Gershwin and certainly Ellington—you see people who are taking risks and experimenting with ad hoc instrumentation.

This all started very early on, actually, as musicians began to pull together performance practices from the spirituals or blues, to chicken bones even. Rhythmic ideas of pulling these things together. We see this going on. Also, we have to mention Scott Joplin who was also doing early experimentation. We are talking about the late 19th century. It's already a practice in place and being notated by Scott Joplin and others in the ragtime period, and by the late 19th century we have all the musicians in New Orleans who were attempting to do the same thing. They were bringing spirituals, blues, European band music, and performing in smaller ensembles with mixed instrumentation so that the musicians have the capacity to do all kinds of things, to improvise as well as do things from the score.

So James P. Johnson and Gershwin, who are starting to dream about this thing in the '20s, have really remade a tradition that's already going on. That's what's really important.

One of the pioneers in this effort is James Reese, who in May of 1912 performed at Carnegie Hall with his Clef Club Symphony Orchestra. If you listen to the orchestration in that enterprise alone, 125 Black musicians doing an ad hoc instrumentation using mandolins, banjos, five trap sets, ten pianos. Basically, he said what he was attempting to do—the result was he and his musicians had developed a kind of symphony music that, no matter what you might think, it's different and distinctive. It lends itself to particular compositions of the race. Already, he's talking about how the music has to match the instrumentation, and, if you do it, you have to do it with a different kind of instrumentation. He was a pioneer in this effort, and we're talking about Carnegie Hall in 1912! By the time Paul Whiteman comes on the scene, and Benny Goodman, and George Gershwin, and all those that follow including James P. Johnson, they are already modeling what James Reese was doing in the early part of the century.

As a child, James P. Johnson is also watching his parents play. They are doing ring-shout dances, spirituals, and blues at the piano at home. Johnson is a child prodigy who is born with perfect pitch. Not only is he hearing everything, he's also watching the putting together of all these performance practices. Very early on, this is a part of how he sees the world musically. When he and Gershwin are dreaming about taking Black popular forms—the spirituals, the blues, the ragtime—and putting them in larger orchestrated forms, they are dreaming about this in the '20s and making these piano rolls, and they both decide to do this. The interesting thing about this is that George always had a friendship with his musicians and colleagues in Harlem.

When Ellington and Johnson are doing this in Harlem, all of these guys are in New York and Gershwin is there too. William C. Handy has written a book and he is orchestrating the blues while this is going on. George Gershwin is a wonderful part of this discussion. Both of these gentlemen attempt to do this. Gershwin gets the credit for it and his works are great, but at the same time he becomes a great inspiration and a continual inspiration for James P. Johnson, who then is able to initiate his pieces later on. We're talking about his jazz piano concerto from 1934; we're talking about his clarinet concerto in 1942. This is his dream to bring those vernacular forms to the concert stage and to orchestrate them for larger works and forms. He is able to do that. He does musicals and ballets. His opera in 1942 is a collaboration between him and Langston Hughes. Earlier this year, we had the premiere of this piece in Michigan that had been sitting for a long time.

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Alan Baker: We don't think about James P. Johnson's name first, but it seems like he was a very significant player in the community. Talk a little bit about his significance historically.

Bill: James P. Johnson is considered the "Father of Stride Piano." That's how you've publicly come to know him. That's only one aspect of his work. He had these other aspirations from his parents and also from hanging out in Harlem at the time and really being impressed by what's called the "Race Men" ideology. There were great thinkers starting with Martin Delany. Then in 1903, we get W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folks*. There is a Black intelligentsia that is writing about upholding the race and expanding the forms that Black folks are using in literature and in music.

That inspires James P. Johnson. He is in Harlem and doing the Harlem Renaissance, doing the jazz age, and so he is a part of all of this. . . . It is this very virtuosic piano approach that is the next leg and arm of ragtime. This is how we come to know him. At the same time, he's writing music with his mentor Fats Waller, and he is also a songwriter. He's also accompanying Bessie Smith and Ethel Waters. He's writing musicals and then hanging out with Gershwin. The idea is that he's going to take these forms, and "You and I, Gershwin, are going to write these large orchestrated pieces for symphony orchestra or large ensemble and then I'm going to take these ragtime piano pieces and these blues pieces and these show tunes and take it to the next level on the concert hall."

Gershwin was able to do this and James P. Johnson was able to do it and get the opportunities to do that. He continued to study as well contemporary harmony and counterpoint and theory. He was making those applications as well in addition to studying orchestration. By the late '30s and '40s, this is when the other larger pieces are beginning to emerge: his *Harlem Symphony* in 1932, a piano concerto in 1934, a clarinet concerto in 1942, and so we see that he is able to work consistently up to his death.

Alan: Tell me a little about what we are hearing in the *Harlem Symphony* and in the confluence of all that music that comes out in the larger forms.

Bill: What you are hearing is a well-developed ragtime style. Vestiges of Black church music, certainly the blues, and you are also hearing a lot of popular music traditions that you would hear in the minstrel show, in the vaudeville and Tin Pan Alley traditions. He's mixing all of that

together. He's also aware of the classical form. There are some of those traditional forms that are being spun out.

You are hearing all of these things together and at the time it was "experimental." It was new. Now it seems very common to us. These gentlemen were true trailblazers to bring all of these forms together, and at a time when the country was still divided on how to value the vernacular forms. By the time we get to Duke Ellington, his attempt is to do the same thing. He gets the critical acclaim for it in 1943. The critics are confused and they say, "We don't understand what he is doing." Gershwin, James P. Johnson, and Duke Ellington, when you look at that period, then you get to see what it is they are doing.

They were trying to shake out this interest between what was "popular" and what was "classical." That's the formula that we are still trying to shake out.

Alan: Talk about the premiere of *Black, Brown and Beige* and that struggle in Ellington's music.

Bill: *Black, Brown and Beige* in 1943 was a media event at Carnegie Hall because it was well publicized in popular print, it was well attended by the leading critics and art circles and supporters of the time, and Duke Ellington had a number of successes internationally. There were a lot of things written about the work of Duke Ellington. We have a major star here at age 44. The critics could like him. It was okay to like Duke Ellington. So the concert was very much appreciated and highly written about. The critics had a problem with *Black, Brown and Beige* because of the premise that this was a tone poem that would somehow pull together the entire history of the African American. It was an interesting idea to do musically, but many of the critics had a problem being able to pull it together. They saw it more as a wonderful vehicle for several jazz tunes. The synthesis of this larger form with the jazz energy, they really didn't understand this. Paul Bowles wrote that it was an "impossible synthesis" and that these two styles are on different wavelengths. The classical mind-set is on a different wavelength than the jazz or popular music, and [he thought] that people would walk away confused. That's what people noticed, that they were sure they liked everything that was going on, but there were various ways to interpret that.

There were good moments here and there, but *Black, Brown and Beige* we didn't quite get. When you listen to it now, the many recordings of it now, it was quite an adventuresome piece. It was quite beautifully done, but just like *The Rite of Spring*, people didn't get it. It's the same thing.

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We may get into trouble for comparing the *Black, Brown and Beige* premiere to *The Rite of Spring*. But the same consciousness is there. What we are doing is breaking into some new territory. Audiences are not sure what that is because they have not heard it. The artist is left with trying to pull together these things, and be true to his own voice, and be true to tradition, and at the same time move ahead. This is difficult.

Alan: Do you think that the breaking of those rules made people uneasy? They didn't know how to absorb it? Do you think that because of the notoriety that preceded the concert, do you think that they weren't prepared for it?

Bill: I think that with any artist, when the popular culture sets a formula for that artist, that's what people want. When the artist decides to continue to grow—which is what Ellington was doing this whole time—people have a problem with that. They say, “No, we like that good thing that you do.” This is something we see played out even today. When an artist decides to try to change a little bit, his or her core audience doesn't follow them down the path very often. This is the case with Ellington. It continued to be a problem as he tried to expand these forms. They were telling him, “No! This is what you should be doing.”

To a large degree he did that, but then we have recordings where he plays with John Coltrane, where he's hanging out and trying to get a sense of things. In the same way, he's not as forward or fast as Miles Davis, but certainly he is expanding the form. He experimented with the sounds within it by having players play violin or taking the orchestration and spinning it a different way. He was constantly experimenting from the very beginning. There is this interesting innovation going on with Ellington all of the time, even if his audience is not aware of his conscious attempt to innovate and go beyond the borders.

Alan: Do you think that is because he is successful at maintaining his voice no matter what the forces employed?

Bill: Absolutely. I think his voice is always there. That's a part of the thing that defines Ellington. The voice includes experimentation. Artists have a way of voicing and writing tunes. They have a particular palette that you come to know as their voice. That doesn't change. All the way up to the '60s and middle '70s. You still hear the Ellington voice, but he's trying to spin that voice. Every artist is always inspired and influenced by the other cultural forces that are around him or her. When Ellington is playing it safe and just doing what the people want,

he's also concerned about social issues, particularly of Black folks. Sometimes people didn't want him to go there. He always was committed to that. He thought that his music was the way Black people's experiences were viewed and how those were explored and how those were growing.

He always stayed true to the folks. That's something that's beautiful about Ellington's work. Even though you hear it up on the stage, you still hear Black culture expanded and put on the concert stage. These folks didn't want you to lose the essence or the essentials of the culture in the music. They are just saying that it, too, can have this expanded form and be heard in these various ways.

Alan: I'm assuming there was plenty of resistance from musical insiders who were giving concerts. Politically, talk a little about his struggles to keep his voice and make those statements in venues that may not have been welcoming.

Bill: I'm not going to address that because it's well documented and I don't want to cite anything. *The Duke Ellington Reader*, edited by Mark Tucker, has many of the correspondences but mostly the critical reviews and also has a lot of Ellington's own articles where he would talk about his music and works in music journals. You can see in his public discourse in the press that there were some questions where he stepped outside of what is his accepted role. Oftentimes, you can see this going back and forth. He was true to his plan from the very beginning.

He was attempting to provide people with entertainment, but it was enlightened entertainment. We use the word *entertainment* to mean just that: It's to make people feel good, but it's also to move people in various ways. I think that's what Ellington was always doing with his forms all the way from the '20s up to his death.

You see it in the larger suites that he began to record. Those were an attempt to bring all kinds of North African music forms in, and so you see him dealing with this all the way through his life.

Now, when you get to Anthony Braxton, the AACM [Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians], we also have a real attempt here to experiment. I think Anthony Braxton is the Black version of Schönberg or Babbitt. This is the Black intellectual avant-garde. They brought Black vernacular culture to the experimental framework. It's a different formula here. They are reconstituting forms and traditions. We were talking about James P. Johnson and Ellington who went to Black vernacular, but what's interesting about the Chicago movement in the '60s was the fact that they also went to social dynamics of Black folks.

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There was an incredible bursting open of new kinds of expressive modes. Political venues were being looked at. The establishment was being shot down, as it were. That's institutions of education, politics, and economics as well as musical institutions. That means the symphony orchestra and Western European mechanisms. These were being shouted at. This is not only the Black avant-garde but also the European avant-garde.

White American avant-garde was attempting to reconfigure music in different ways. The Chicago music looked to Africa. They saw in the way in which African music was organized, there was a spirituality of Africa, the notion of music as ritual. You aren't just doing something for the concert stage but are really engaged with the audience. These were some of the other things that shaped the music and the movement.

Black social cause, American social cause. You have the avant-garde that's going on in both of these circles. Black traditional music circles and jazz performers and traditional concert music performers are also breaking in new areas.

So there is a wonderful mix there. Free jazz, which came with Ornette Coleman's album in 1961, is an attempt to turn jazz on its head again and just have no changes. Play exactly what the energy dictates in terms of the performers' playing of the instruments. What does that tell us about where we are going to go as opposed to a score? This is kind of a radical thing. With this side of concert music, you had aleatoric practices—free associations. You had atonality and serialism going on. All of these forces together begin to converge and I think that the AACM and this group of musicians really brought all of this together in some very wonderful ways. Anthony Braxton becomes a central composer in that movement.

This whole Chicago movement was also trying to move away from the European notion of a sole composer, that there was a communal music that was important. It was important because that was central to the kinds of social politics that were going on with the civil rights movement, which then got mechanized a little later on. You see how it's all moving together. They were also bent on playing original music and helping each other facilitate one another's music. They had the founding of the AACM on May 8; they drew up the papers in 1965. This ensemble and this political and musical group tried to keep all of these principles in place and they trained younger musicians in this way.

They did clinics, performances, and concerts where these musicians upheld the principles and ideas of the AACM.

CHAPTER NINE
HARLEM RENAISSANCE, 1920–1935
Artistry, Aesthetics, Politics, and Popular Culture

The Harlem Renaissance, also known as the New Negro Arts Movement (1920–1935), was a period in American cultural history where preserving the life and culture of community was simultaneously an investment into cultural relevancy at all levels through music, literature, arts, dance, education, and business, and social-cultural engagement. Equally, race and culture leaders as well as educators at this time focused their commitments on the larger questions of the future of American society. People from New York’s Harlem community—extending across the national, artistic, entrepreneurial, and educational lines—were asking: What do we value now, and why? What and how are the best ways forward to create, project, and live in those values? What are we investing in, and what do we believe in for our future?

Additionally to cultural-social advancement, education, and the arts, this movement was also focused on real estate investment and political action, and in many ways was one grand sociocultural plan aimed at cementing Black modern culture centrally into the new world of the 20th century. Coupled with the ideas and energy of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Urban League, and Marcus Garvey’s UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association), this was a time of tremendous social-cultural engineering that was led by a group of forward thinkers known as “race men” and “race women.” Although they primarily focused on the new identities of millions of Black Americans, ultimately they profoundly shaped American and cultural arts history.

They did this because, for the first time in American history, artists and thinkers worked to address needs, projections, and outcomes.

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The interests in these questions and arts movements as critical historical cultural markers, the artists and artistry from this period, and with that, the processes that led to the creation of progressive American culture, are the foci of this essay. A secondary theme is the impact those art questions and results have had on commercial political/cultural currency and relevancy on at least two other musical arts periods: the civil rights/social protest/soul period (1960–1975) and hip-hop, X, and millennium generation music (1980–2010s).

The notion of artists' ideas and ideals being formulated, expressed, and represented through creative expression is largely illustrated in every direction with the Harlem Renaissance, and follows all modern movements today where music and art emboldened a generation to express itself in music and arts. Here are projected ideas, artistic personal expressions, feelings, communal and national ideologies, styles, and progressive social modernism.

Say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud.

—James Brown, 1967

All of the songs that come out of these periods are progressive identity works, carried in blues/jazz song, social protest, and then hip-hop. There is within this, as well, a fascinating cultural-political-class divide we see carried through from the Harlem Renaissance to current times related to the questions of determining what is the appropriate “artistic culture” voice and who determines what the community will value. For example, even then in the 1920s, there were divides between W.E.B. Du Bois's notion of a “Talented Tenth” (that the community could best be carried forward by an educated class within) and Booker T Washington's “five fingers” Southern proletarian mission of “adjustment and submission” (the idea that people should work in skilled areas with their hands, as in agriculture), or the arguments for a “common man's” blues-based vernacular vs. Euro-American fused concert art music. There was also Marcus Garveyism and the back-to-Africa movements vs. the Du Boisian idea of Black progress through progressive intellectual assimilation in America. And then later, Malcolm X's Black nationalism vs. Martin Luther King's peaceful integration. These varied positions continue in popular culture

with Spike Lee and Tyler Perry or a Ghetto Fabulous, sexually explicit, gangster rap vs. Will Smith and Black Eyed Peas's mainstreamed urban pop. The lineup of artists, ideas, aesthetics, social-cultural politics, and popular culture polar shifts in ideology and approach is demonstrative and essential. All these point to the seminal weight of the stirrings of the Harlem Renaissance movement of the 1920s.

"If we must die—oh, let us nobly die, . . . like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack / Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!" were the famous lines of poet Claude McKay from 1919, believed to be one of the most inspiring writers who fueled the early movement. His voice was never one of compromise or complacency. Herein lies the compelling and interesting study of the Harlem Renaissance, which captured all these complexities of race, class, politics of expression, the divisions in ideology among the writers and thinkers, the "race men and women," the younger Black art progressives vs., as one author called them, "Black taste makers." All this set the stage for how generations of young people would pose similar questions and birth their own unique social-political art expressions and manifestos. These explorations—divisions, even—allow us to see the sophistication in American class, values, race, political-social, and aesthetic formulations and to examine, probe, and produce the helpful questions about criteria and quality and processes of art.

These common people are not afraid of spirituals, as for a long time their more intellectual brethren were, and jazz is their child. They furnish a wealth of colorful, distinctive material for any artist, because they still hold their own individuality in the face of American standardizations. . . . Let the blare of Negro jazz bands and the bellowing voice of Bessie Smith singing the Blues penetrate the closed ears of the colored near intellectuals until they listen and perhaps understand.

—Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," 1926

And if by today's definition of popular contemporary music, in the second decades of the 21st century, we include: Beyoncé, Rihanna, Spike Lee, P-Diddy, Queen Latifah, Tyler Perry, Russell Simmons, Will Smith, Justin Timberlake, Lil Wayne, Andre 3000, Kanye West, Monique, J. Lo,

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Jay-Z—all these connect to, represent, relatively speaking, contemporary examples of race men/women’s concerns for what artists might be, or be not, what’s best and what’s not, and what’s Black art and what’s not. In comparing these contemporary artists to the Harlem Negro artists and figures of the 1920s and 1930s, such as Bessie Smith, Florence Mills, Bojangles Robinson, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Paul Robeson, Marian Anderson, Duke Ellington, James Weldon Johnson, Madam C. J. Walker, and Alain Locke, we find compelling linkages. In many ways there is a similar profusion of personalities who hold the mainstream audience captive. These questions “What is the music/art of our times?” “How does it mean?” and “What value does it hold for us forward?” are always critical. A view into contemporary culture and linkages to the past is very revealing.

Harlem Renaissance Cultural Context

The larger cultural-historical backdrop of the Harlem Renaissance can be summed up in a few key ideas or words: World War I, European and Southern migrations, race and culture clash, economics and opportunity, new cultural vision, and a definition of a new 20th-century America.

The race leaders, older and perhaps elitist, might quote James Weldon Johnson from the *Book of American Negro Poetry*: “Nothing will do more to change the mental attitude and raise his status than the demonstration of intellectual parity by the Negro through the production of literature and art.” This again was in response to a desperate cry against raw racism such as increased lynchings of Blacks in the South and severe race riots throughout the North and South.

The war had been fought in the years 1914–1918. It raised and fired up the ongoing questions within the Black community about what democracy and freedom really meant at home. Although these questions were not new, added onto this was the confluence of European migrations, many of whom were displaced because of famine, war, and political oppression in their own countries. Despite immigration restrictions during the war years, millions of Europeans were also fighting for economic, cultural, social, and political stability in a new 20th-century America. Racism and hate against Blacks in the South was not new either, but the early 20th century saw a new ingredient: competition for jobs among now

three groups—northern urban Whites and Blacks, new European immigrants, and the increasing swell of southern Blacks to northern cities, called the Great Migration, in search of jobs and cultural opportunities. By the summer of 1919, right after the war's end, many were calling it the “Red Summer,” because 25 national race riots broke out.

Blacks suffered “terrorism American style” all over the country. And while racial hatred and suspicion were the leading factors, the conflicts that arose in economics and labor drove the fighting over the top.

Harlem had now become for the race leaders a model place to live, a place to live and be, and a place to express what that could look like for the future. The leaders used Black newspapers, articles, spokespersons of influence, and of course the glamorous appeal of all kinds of popular artists to raise the image of Harlem as the “place to be.”

Harlem was not the only landing ground for Blacks during this period; cities like Detroit, Chicago, Atlanta, and Washington, D.C., were all places particularly where southern Blacks sought refuge and began to reestablish a new sense of independence and economic stability. Through this lens comes the creation of culture that illuminates that cultural stability. For good reasons, music, literature, and the arts were promoted and could project the new hopes of these communities. Harlem, New York, was the most celebrated and mythologized. Harlem by the mid-1920s was called “the Negro capital of the world.” In this mix of searching and finding new measures of how to move forward rose the many cultural debates of the early 20th century. Alain Locke wrote in his *The New Negro* in 1925, “America is seeking a new spiritual expansion and artistic maturity, trying to found an American literature, a national art, and national music implies a Negro-American culture seeking the same satisfaction and objectives.”

The Ideas

It seems that the whites have not yet been able to realize and understand that these people in striving to better their physical and social surroundings in accordance with their financial and intellectual progress are simply obeying an impulse which is common to human nature the world over.

—James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, 1927

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The idea of a collective, identifiable Black aesthetic as an ideology, a movement, can very well be seen in these activities of the 1920s to 1935. This was a decade-plus in which we have extraordinary creativity in the arts among African Americans. W.E.B. Du Bois, the leading intellectual of the day, believed racial progress was to be made in mainstream achievement. He celebrated excellence in business, education, and the arts. The book *The New Negro*, written in 1925 by Alain Locke, Howard University professor of philosophy, chronicled this move and became the manifesto of the movement. Matching with the American ideals of uniqueness of voice, freedom, and uplift, Locke envisioned this as an equally important American moment. Philip A. Payton and the Afro American (AA) Realty Co., a Black-owned business, as well as T. Thomas Fortune, editor of the *New York Age*, an influential Black newspaper, were all connected to Booker T. Washington and his National Negro Business League founded in 1900. The AA Realty Co. bought and leased buildings. They progressively placed Negro families in these buildings.

Harlem then became in ways racially tolerant, allowing Blacks to purchase and manage their own businesses and real estate, and fully became the Negro capital of the world. Harlem became the home of the most pervasive cultural social institutions for Black people at the time: the NAACP, the National Urban League, Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, and newspapers and journals such as the *Crisis*, the *Messenger*, the *Negro Word*. White patronage as well helped to support all of this. William E. Harmon, a wealthy real estate developer, set up the Harmon Foundation to give Negro Achievement Awards. Charlotte Osgood Mason, as well as publishers Knopf, MacMillan, Harcourt-Brace, and Harper House, published literary works in volume. The era could now produce and promote dozens of young progressive artists/writers/musicians/thinkers who defined the period: Augusta Savage, Palmer Hayden, Richmond Barthe, Aaron Douglas, Archibald Motley Jr., W. H. Johnson, Melvin Gray Johnson, Claude McKay, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Toomer, Arna Bontemps, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Romare Beardon, Eubie Blake, William Grant Still, Marian Anderson, and Paul Robeson. This was singularly the most concrete and enduring arts movement in American history. Musically, Harlem became the symbol of and home to great Black

musicians and popular styles that flourished too. James Reese Europe with his Clef Club Orchestra virtually created the first models of sophisticated, gigging jazz bands. James P. Johnson, the great stride and ragtime pianist, created the piece “Charleston,” which also became a national dance fad. Thomas “Fats” Waller, Eubie Blake, Lucky Roberts, and Willie the Lion Smith all become “total orchestra” pianists, playing clubs and “rent parties” and creating a style known as “Stride Piano of Harlem” in the 1930s.

As well, the Cotton Club in Harlem is where Duke Ellington got a regular “radio hook up” and became a national star, and Cab Calloway created a kind of “vocal rapping” called *help and jive talking*.

This was all linked to the conscious creation and baking of a diverse poised Black intelligentsia whose major concern was racial and cultural-social uplift.

In these ways, the movement was a model of artistic agency that—apart from its racial-cultural codes—resonated with the larger narrative of defining what was culturally relevant and what kinds of ideals were typical in artistic citizenry.

Hip-Hop Cultural Context and Ideas

Hip-hop—or rap music, as it first was titled—began commercially with the release of “Rapper’s Delight” in 1979 by the Sugarhill Gang. The music/culture was a movement that had emerged in the consciousness of communities much earlier. Again, through sharing experiences and by diasporic connections from Jamaica to the Bronx, there emerged by the 1980s, some 50 years-plus after the 1920s Harlem Black arts movement, a new impulse in Black music/art. This particular expressive form grew out of neighborhood parties in the early ’70s where the DJs spinning records used to talk with the audience during a break between records. DJs would challenge each other, thereby creating a contemporary urban debate session couched in slang word battles, rhyme schemes, and humorous ways of telling a story. And like the Harlem Renaissance model, this was largely a New York phenomenon, which included music, poetry, dance, and a popular arts painting component. (Jean-Michel Basquiat’s paintings were a mix of avant-garde graffiti hip-hop meets Romare Beardon, Jackson Pollock, Picasso, and Frida Kahlo.) But what’s interesting—and the connecting thread here about the rise of the rappers and particularly hip-hop

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culture early on as “central cultural figures” and a generational ideology—is the attention that was paid to what they were saying. A very important aspect of the hip-hop movement rarely spoken of in academic discourse is the critical presence of community activism.

Groups like Afrika Bambaataa and his Zulu Nation created manifestos that strove for “unity in our community,” and wove themes into their works such as knowledge, wisdom, freedom, peace, unity, love, and respect. “Don’t push me ’cause I’m close to the edge / I’m trying not to lose my head / It’s like a jungle sometimes / It makes me wonder how I keep from goin’ under” (Grandmaster Flash, 1981). In this way, these ideas and the commitment to these artists for the uplift of community was a direct link to what we saw earlier with the Harlem Renaissance race leaders.

While the argument can be made that the surfaces look different—the focus of the race leaders was an upper-class idea with Langston Hughes, which was a far cry from the younger Harlem Renaissance artists—the Harlem Renaissance interests and those of hip-hop both shifted to the most “raw and real” expressions. Here the deeper sources and the surface become vernacular; these popular contemporary forms are more closely associated with common everyday, nonacademic people amid their social cultural concerns and entanglements in the social system. Here is rap and hip-hop’s domain.

A Quasi-Qualitative Study (Case Study)

In a music/culture study at Central High in St. Paul, Minnesota, a most revealing sharing was in the discussions with high school students about the cultural connections between the art and literature movement of the Harlem Renaissance and the hip-hop movement. Hip-hop here was used as an overall category inclusive of this generation’s (those born between 1980 and 2004) identities.

A scenario was given as students looked at the Harlem Renaissance and hip-hop movement: What were the similarities, impact, and implications on modern culture? Students in the literature of the Harlem Renaissance classes reviewed and read the writing and lives of figures from Langston Hughes to Zora Neale Hurston. Students observed the musical movements of the social protest ’60s music and Motown artistry and correlating meanings and goals of the Harlem generation, again comparing these with

the poetry of the hip-hop movement. It was suggested to students that Russell Simmons could be viewed similarly as one “coining the phrases” of the hip-hop generation, mechanizing, generating, and bankrolling culture, similarly to Alain Locke, Charles Johnson, and the Harlem Renaissance race thinkers and movers and shakers. In an interview on public radio, Mr. Simmons defended the stories and messages behind the music and articulated the entire commercial development of this movement.

Rap is about disenfranchised poor people. And these people have become leaders in mainstream American culture, and relevant to all those voiceless people. And 80 percent of those who buy this music are not Black. And that's what makes it so relevant, because people who are driving in their cars in Beverly Hills understanding the plight of people in Compton. People who live in trailer parks are connecting to the same energy and know that they have the same issues and poverty conditions of people who are living in the urban area, in the projects. Now the connection is made between all young people in America and they are listening and understanding the plight of the poor, and that is a big deal that will change America to be more sensitive to the suffering people in our country. Puffy [P. Diddy] ran in a fund-raising race to raise one million dollars for music education. Jay-Z has a scholarship fund, he's registering voters. Hip Hop Summit registered 11,000 voters [in New York]. In the Detroit Hip Hop Summit people came out with paper and pen in hand to empower their community. They are doing a lot of good. Their ideas about empowerment are as known and respected as Howard Dean's or the politicians. In the first Hip Hop Summit with Jay-Z, Puffy, and Mariah Carey, 100,000 people came out and the mayor put back millions of dollars into the education budget. They are rallying their strength to do good in their communities. They are thinking about higher elevation and consciousness. It's the truth if you listen to it. Hip-hop poetry is truth because people connect to truth. Hip-hop is the most honest, with most integrity of any commercial art form being distributed today.

Looking at the 13–15-year run of the Harlem Renaissance (1920–1935) and the now 30-year-plus stretch of hip-hop (1979–2014+), students were asked, “What similarities could be made between these two cultural movements?”

The students responded that the hip-hop generation voiced the modern concerns of the world today more realistically, were consciously interested in

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the betterment of America's youth community, used their popular culture as a way to better the world by bringing more people together through the narratives in rap music focused on current issues (police brutality, the ills of drug culture, male/female relations, social chaos) and more aggressively, and that hip-hop as an art form must be taken seriously as a powerful art voice in modern culture.

Conclusions

The Harlem Renaissance (1920–1935), with its artistry, aesthetics, politics, and popular culture expression, was a snapshot into the richness of ideas about artistic production and its meaning. Today many of these questions are raised, mused about, sung, and rified on by creative artists initiated first in large numbers during the Harlem Renaissance, and then music in American contemporary expressions. The bridge—the connecting era, the social-protest/soul movements of the 1960s and 1970s—provided the mainstream with a larger “startup” for the more aggressive progressive politics that became civil rights legislation in the 1964 Civil Rights Bill. Those songs such as “Respect,” “Say It Loud,” “Let It Be,” “Satisfaction,” and “Ain’t No Stopping Us Now” were banner songs that expressed and voiced the concerns of millions of people and were heard in popular song and culture. These are very powerful models for interpreting contemporary as well as historical social phenomena relative to class, gender, politics, spiritual expression, and identity, and are one of our most important markers of our national identity.

Laugh, yo' Little Niggers.

Moderato.

Words and Music by HATTIE STARR.

Come a-long lit-tle nig-gers, come a-long to my ca-bin, I see
Did you hyar 'bout de deb-il? well it beat all cre-a-tion, Last
night he robbed de chick-en coop, his lan-tern was de moon, I
got roast-ed pos-sum wid de gra-by jus' a drip-pin',
chase and I catch him, on de mas-sah's plan-ta-tion,

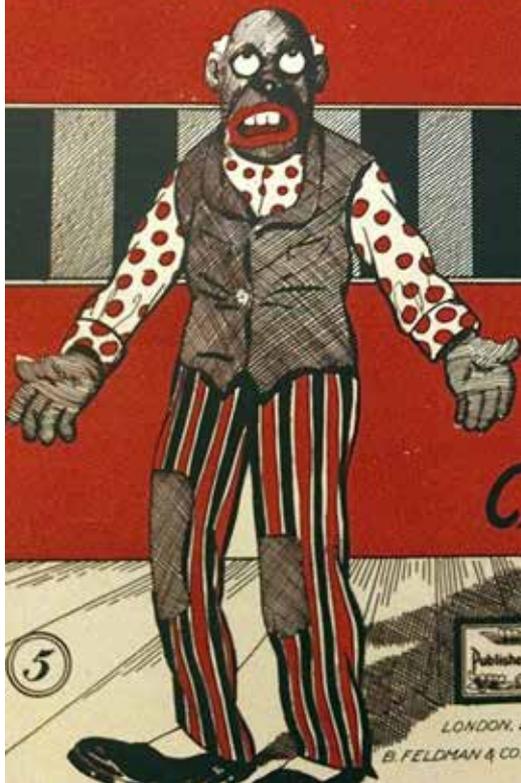
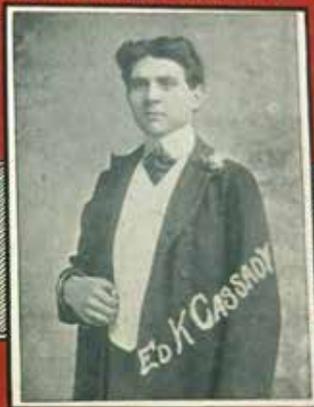
Copyright, 1895, by M. Witmark & Sons. Entered at Stationers' Hall, London, Eng.
Complete Copies 40 cents.

"Laugh, Yo' Little Niggers," American sheet music from 1895.

NOBODY CARES FOR A COON

THE LAMENT OF A
SENSITIVE COON.

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LONDON, ENGL., TORONTO, CANADA,
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"Nobody Cares for a Coon," American sheet music.

CAUTION!!

COLORED PEOPLE

OF BOSTON, ONE & ALL,

You are hereby respectfully CAUTIONED and advised, to avoid conversing with the

**Watchmen and Police Officers
of Boston,**

For since the recent **ORDER OF THE MAYOR & ALDERMEN**, they are empowered to act as

KIDNAPPERS

AND

Slave Catchers,

And they have already been actually employed in **KIDNAPPING, CATCHING, AND KEEPING SLAVES**. Therefore, if you value your **LIBERTY**, and the *Welfare of the Fugitives* among you, *Shun* them in every possible manner, as so many **HOUNDS** on the track of the most unfortunate of your race.

**Keep a Sharp Look Out for
KIDNAPPERS, and have
TOP EYE open.**

APRIL 24, 1851.

Caution Colored People of Boston, from the 1850s.



New Orleans home left standing after Katrina (2009).



Mississippi griot Ben Payton.



Guitarists exchange.



Author with Stephen Johnson, grandson of Robert Johnson, in the Mississippi Delta.



Author with David Honeyboy Edwards.



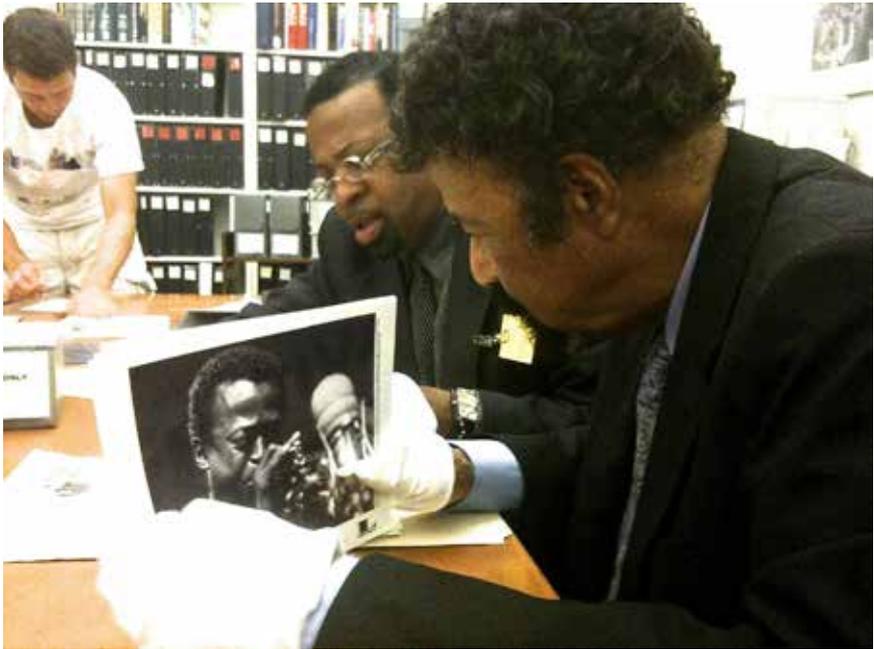
David Honeyboy Edwards.



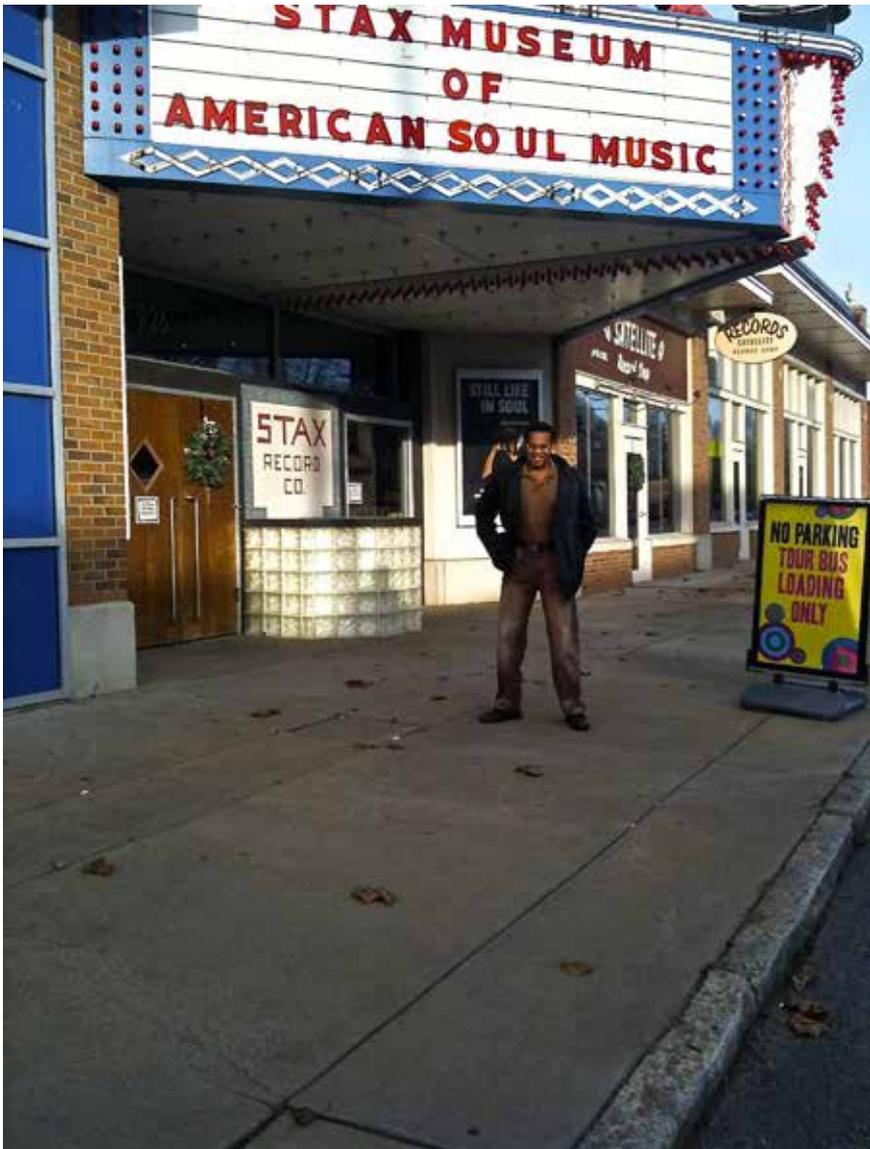
Buddy Bolden band, the original American Band 1890s.



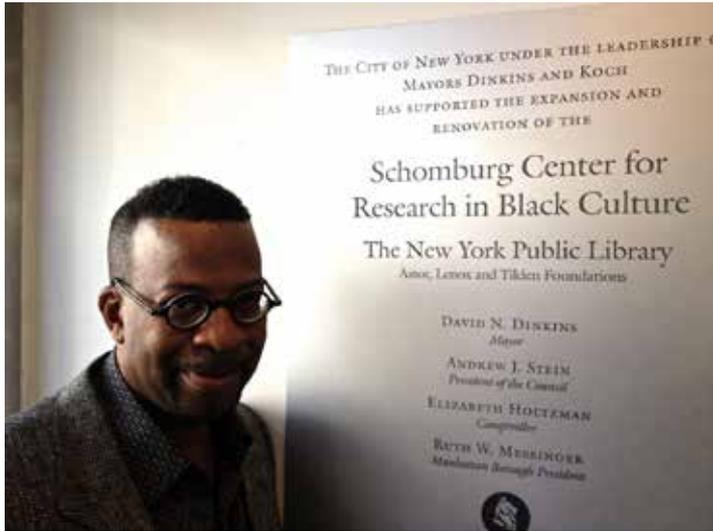
Author with Quincy Jones.



Author with David Baker, conducting research at Smithsonian.



At the Stax Museum.



Author at Schomburg Center, in Harlem, New York.

Public Sale of Negroes,
By RICHARD CLAGETT.

On Tuesday, March 5th, 1833 at 1:00 P. M. the following Slaves will be sold at Pottery Mart, in Charleston, S. C.
Miscellaneous Lots of Negroes, mostly house servants, some for field work.

Conditions: 1/3 cash, balance by bond, bearing interest from date of sale. Payable in one to two years to be secured by a mortgage of the Negroes, and approved personal security. Auctioneer will pay for the papers.

A valuable Negro woman, accustomed to all kinds of house work. Is a good plain cook, and excellent dairy maid, washes and irons. She has four children, one a girl about 12 years of age, another 7, a boy about 5, and an infant 11 months old. 2 of the children will be sold with mother, the others separately, if it best suits the purchaser.

A very valuable blacksmith, wife and daughters; the Smith is in the prime of life, and a perfect master at his trade. His wife about 27 years old, and his daughters 12 and 10 years old have been brought up as house servants, and as such are very valuable. Also for sale 2 likely young negro wenches, one of whom is 16 the other 13, both of whom have been taught and accustomed to the duties of house servants. The 16 year old wench has one eye.

A likely yellow girl about 17 or 18 years old, has been accustomed to all kinds of house and garden work. She is sold for no fault. Sound as a dollar.

House servants: The owner of a family described herein, would sell them for a good price only, they are offered for no fault whatever, but because they can be done without, and money is needed. He has been offered \$1250. They consist of a man 30 to 33 years old, who has been raised in a genteel Virginia family as house servant, Carriage driver etc., in all which he excels. His wife a likely wench of 23 to 30 raised in like manner, as chamber maid, seamstress, nurse etc., their two children, girls of 12 and 4 or 5. They are bright mulattoes, of mild tractable dispositions, unassuming manners, and of genteel appearance and well worthy the notice of a gentleman of fortune needing such.

Also 14 Negro Wenches ranging from 16 to 25 years of age, all sound and capable of doing a good days work in the house or field.

Public sale of Negroes.

CRAZY BLUES

By PERRY BRADFORD



MAMIE SMITH AND HER JAZZ HOUNDS

Get this number for your phonograph on Okeh Record No. 41

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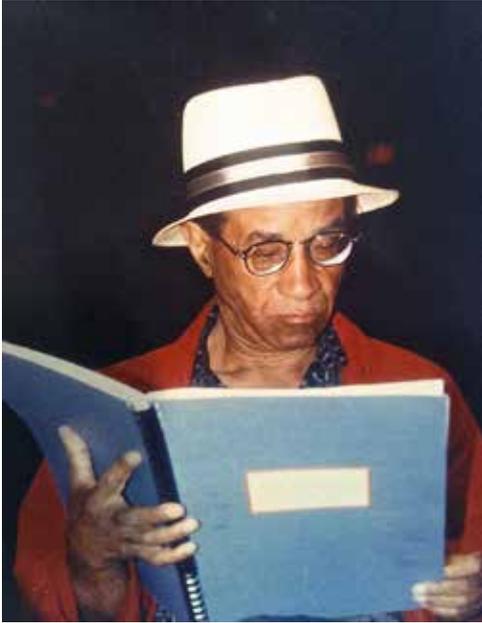
Crazy Blues.



Maestro and musicians.



Regina Carter.



Max Roach.



Global musicians share with author.



Author teaching a pop music ensemble at Indiana University in 1991.



Author with composer and philosopher Fred Ho.



Ladies of opera.

INTERLUDES

These interludes are presented here as a transition bridge between theory and practice, history and contemporary cultural critique essays. These are about connecting in community.

These are personal intersections in daily living relationships and are about being involved in the local communities we live and play in. I think it is important to share these letters and short essay pieces, and program notes about interactions that come out of people's stories and narratives. (Note: The letters and short essays have been changed to correct spelling and minor typographical errors, but remain essentially the same.)

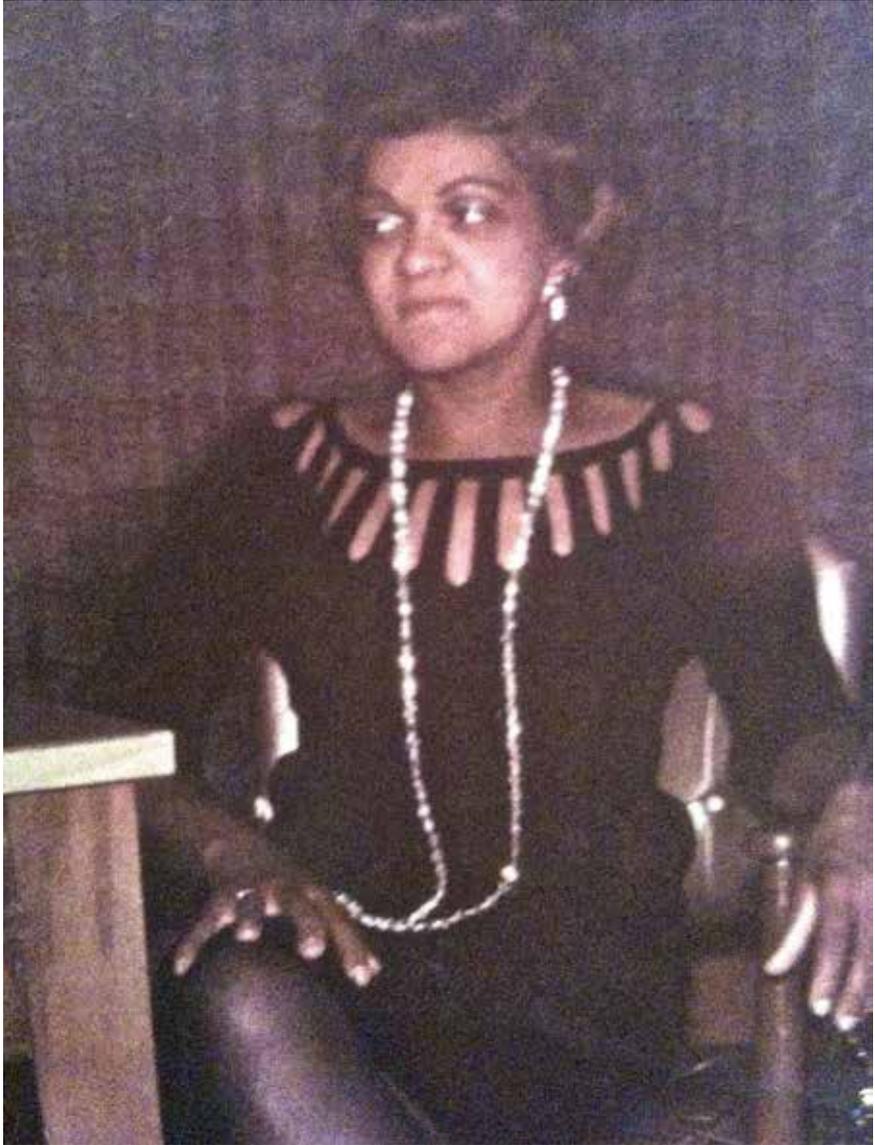
Artistry is about citizenry. So how do we live in our local neighborhoods, and deal with each other, in our states, nation, with our family? Presented here are letters to the Columbia College of Chicago and its board of directors in support of the Center for Black Music Research, which was facing serious cutbacks that many of us felt were detrimental to the work of the institution; a letter of support written to the Massachusetts Humanities council for a local book fair; a personal letter written to Deval Patrick, governor of Massachusetts, regarding the political gridlocks in Congress and with the president; an unpublished essay on my own mother's work in the local Detroit community and my dad; and the program notes from my Symphony 10, *Affirmations*, performed by the National Symphony, written first for the concert and then extended as a blog piece in response to an unfair review of the symphony in the *Washington Post*, which said the work was "too positive."



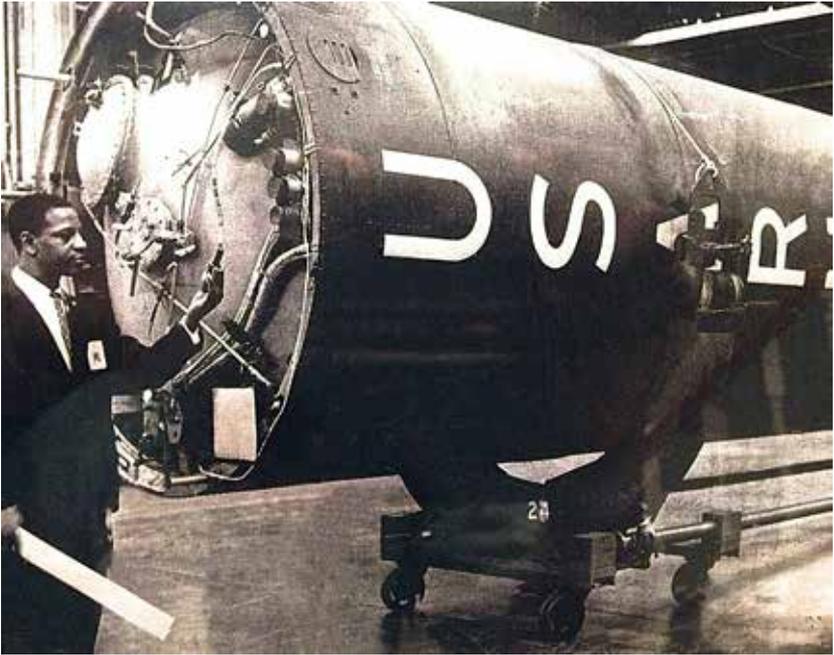
Sweet Honey in the Rock.



Author with Sweet Honey in the Rock, and the Morgan State Choir, with the National Symphony, in Washington, D.C., in 2012.



Author's mother, Anne Banfield.



Author's father, William Banfield Sr.



Composer, philosopher, and author George Lewis.

CHAPTER TEN

LETTERS

June 2012, to the Columbia College Board

I am writing to the College Board, Trustees, in regard to the proposed cuts that will affect the Center for Black Music Research [CBMR] at Columbia College. We in the music profession at the academic and artistry/performance levels are indebted to the CBMR and its incredible staff. This center and those professionals have provided the critical presence and commitment to not only the establishment of a needed research center, but the preservation of the culture and the sustaining of the field. My entire academic career and development, over 25 years, has been supported and nurtured by this center; my artistic work, music, scores, and books are housed and maintained in this center; and its world-class staff and directors have provided me with invaluable guidance in our shared work together. Most recently I was commissioned by Quincy Jones and his foundation to write, along with noted scholar/composer educator David Baker, the history of American popular music, proposed as a national required curriculum for nationwide schools. Monica and staff were our last finishing stop, where the staff reviewed the curriculum, met us for a full day to provide expertise and advice, giving of their time toward this important effort.

We all send everyone to the center not only to physically visit but to make use of its resources for noted scholars and interested research inquires. The CBMR has grown to be the place where we visit, call, and look to as a beacon in the world to model our work after. Without this kind of center, much of the work in the preserving and the knowledgeable handling of these materials, and human “live” scholarship and research professionalism will be gone. Being the only such focused, dedicated center providing all this, the discontinuance of these programs would be a horrible loss in the music culture world.

We ask that you reevaluate the idea of short-changing the humanities and the Black Music Research Center, and keep this and its staff in place to continue to provide your community and the world at large this invaluable and nonreplaceable institution.

Our very best hopes forward,
 Dr. William C. Banfield
 Professor of Africana Studies, Music and
 Society and Director of Africana Studies Center
 Berklee College of Music

2010, to the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities

I am writing in support of the Boston Book Fair's Humanities grant proposal. The vision, exhilaration, multiple offerings, and organizational ability to house and host such a rich event is inspiring, to say the least.

1. *Why do you want to be part of this project?*

2. *What do you think the project will contribute to the humanities in Massachusetts?*

The Boston Book Fair is a singular event in the arts and humanities offerings in Boston. I believe we have to teach and share with people to value ideas, expression, and the importance of living with the creation of ideas. Then people learn they live within creative environments from which their living and ideas come out of. This way, the humanities is seen as inextricably bound with how people want to live in the world. "Cultural Relevance" is the formula for arts survival, and the way to show how creative arts are connecting.

3. *What specific expertise or research interests do you bring to the project?*

I currently serve as professor of Africana Studies/Music and Society, director of Center for Africana Studies and programs, Berklee College of Music, Boston. Prior, I served as the Endowed Chair of Humanities, Fine Arts, Professor of Music, director of American Cultural Studies/Jazz, Popular, World Music Studies, University of St. Thomas, Minnesota (1997–2005).

Everything I know about my people, my cultural history, is given through Black music and arts.

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So that makes for me, this history, arts, critical to life. If you study this history, this great evolving story, you will find life greatly sculpted into a movement of personalities, ideas, heart, values, spirit, science, innovation and music, literature, and arts.

4. *What is your role in the planning of the project?*

Our planning discussions have been very dynamic in both helping to shape new directions but as well having, at close hand, shelves of books and a Who's Who list of local and national authors and scholars engaging. I am chairing, hosting the segments in African American culture and perspectives.

5. *What will your role be in the implementation of the project; for example, will you be a speaker, panelist, workshop leader, discussion leader, or consultant?*

As speaker/host, I will guide the audience and indicate how the author's presentations are connected to the project's target audiences, interested in cultural studies, the humanities, and culture.

This panel would include authors specializing in Black and cultural studies, jazz, and humanities and culture. It would actually attract a broad range of ideas and new authors, locally and nationally. There are lots of books on African American cultural criticism, and given we have three Africana Studies departments in the Boston area (Harvard, Northeastern, Berklee College), and no doubt, majors and minors, in the curriculums of many colleges. This area will be a great draw and of interest. As well, given the richness of jazz criticism and its linkage to American cultural identity, the two areas could run well together under this heading. Another focus is a share about the value of teaching with popular culture, and how to identify and use themes, concepts, and interdisciplinary bridges to link music culture with broad-based learning objectives in education and literature.

If we could model the idea of the worth and value of a fuller picture of arts education, we could ensure the next generation of artists would make even deeper inroads with their art doing and being.

Music and humanities education is an extremely engaging and fulfilling study that guarantees guidance and shaping in education from many angles. The study of the arts is not just "extracurricular," it is *essential* curricular. There is no doubt about it, when young people, artists, study creative history in music, the arts, literature, film, dance, and humanities, they are tapped into a "full history" of important movements in ideas,

personalities, and creative enterprises that shaped history and will inspire young people to participate and contribute to the world they live in.

One of the greatest achievements in terms of expressive culture of modernity is popular music. Creative movements from hip-hop to civil rights, to bebop to the Harlem Renaissance, from the Blues to Ornette and free jazz, are examples of young creative thinkers who pressed forward and used innovative expression to propel their own identities and create solutions that touched lives and increased participatory citizenry.

The panel, and the contributing authors, raise up the idea that contemporary music education ought to equip younger people to think about a sense, place of themselves as participating and contributing in culture. We want to encourage younger people to think critically about the meaning of what art is, from the standpoint of an individual, a critical, creative thinker.

This “music-art-culture view” is a journey through a “cultural studies lens” that explores artistry, identity, history, values, and spiritual-social-political plains. One of the purposes of an arts-centered (humanities) curriculum is to engage and refine the thinking and development of the “inner core-soul,” to ensure we equip students with opportunities to consider these ideas. Hopefully contributing to society as citizens, or being sociopolitically aware, won’t seem so distant from their musical-life experience. The teaching role is really to lead as a tour guide pulling together an illustrative narrative and overview, which are reflective again of the artistry and social movements that gave rise to music.

Today, a global worldview is absolutely essential to our vitality as citizens. Artists and educators need to be in touch with these impulses; a multiethnic world and a host of strategies and views found in contemporary culture, artistic creation, production, education, and business. Educational programming broadens the understanding, definition, and direction of contemporary music culture-doing.

September 10, 2011, Letter to the Governor

Dear Governor Patrick.

How are you? I’ve never written a Governor before. I have wanted to ask you questions before about politics and culture, but felt shy about it.

Governor, I am scared and worried that these two ideas, politics and culture, today seem to be challenged and even a losing formula. The spirit

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of gridlock, hardened positions, obvious attack, and relentless negative reporting on government, and the lack of good will toward the president is depressing. Because the climate is so negative, I don't even want to watch the news anymore. I'm almost nearing non-interest involvement in discussions about the direction of our political culture.

Are we in trouble in culture too? I wonder if even a hopeful, rational voice could even be recognized or heard in such loud, divisive, spirited political culture? With all our president is doing, his commitment to the good of our country, this is rarely discussed. We see him working very hard and being committed at every level. Their hate for this man is so obvious. I turned 50 recently, and I have never seen a more committed, earnest, and focused political leader at this level. If he cannot overcome this kind of divisiveness, clearly culturally as well as politically based banter, envy, and rancor, none of us will be safe from this kind of hatred. You overcame such stuff, even here, in the place I saw racial hatred worn as cultural norm like Boston loves its sports.

So perhaps there is light. There is no reason, ideologically or politically, why our country should not be able to rise out of this "funk" and focus on helping our society be its best.

This is a shame.

I am of recent a very concerned and depressed citizen. Is even the notion of "citizenry" even possible living in a time when few politicians command or imbue respect?

The Senator Weiner media week and numerous other horrible public behavior patterns by public servants erodes our confidence. It seems we have morphed into a system that elects irresponsible individuals. And, the criteria too for being elected is changing it seems—money, celebrity, or anyone who can rile up enough people to be mad about something don't seem to be enough to sustain a "successful" political career. Political, legal expertise, and the good for the common citizen it seems too often is no longer what drives our social political machinery.

Looking at our social-political options forward, how could we rise out of this "social stink" our society has fallen under?

Has there been a time before (aside from the Civil War) where our country was at odds and throats like this, and do these things work themselves away with new regime change, or have we stepped into a whole other climate where new governing is in order?

Could, given a potential collapse of a weakened economic system, we be taken over by a foreign power who we owe money to?

Would we have to reroute our entire economic system to accommodate the debt crisis and create a new, leaner way of living?

I know in the music industry, and even in education, everything is being rebooted and created in terms of materials, pedagogy, cultural studies, and new assessment tools for measuring education effectiveness, but as well, how to gauge and engage what seems like a completely new student shaped by a “new cultural” environment, which they live in and are shaped by.

Education should be “the new horizon of hope,” but our country’s political attention is rarely focused on developing young people. What a missed opportunity this is for ensuring our growth forward and shaping our culture!

I spent the last two years, as you know, working with and for Quincy Jones to develop a new approach to teaching culture in the schools using the development of American popular music as the frame. I had to write a complete history but as well an educational approach to teaching culture. But much too of the challenge with this research, discussion with teachers, traveling, and interviews still toggle on the unsettled ground of a shifting culture, the tremors of which are still bubbling new every day. Teachers are suspicious and tattered, torn and clearly “underloved.”

As I am working with an intern from Brown University to arrange book materials for the biography, we are finding that Pat and Amiri were “dealing” with new shifts and changes in the 1970s. I find this really exciting.

We, as artists in the humanities, always feel we understand the cultural and human codes necessary to have a dialogue of the mind, heart, and community.

Our problem is getting beyond the cultural, political blockages that society is largely drawn, spun from and upon.

I write now, locked in a room in southern Indiana, refining my *Affirmation* symphony with a copyist as we prepare for the Kennedy premiere of my symphony with Sweet Honey. But I feel sometimes helpless even in art to really respond with any hope, because of the crusting and hardening of our political-social culture.

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I'd like very much to send an affirming note up and out into the air and be as Richard Wright hoped and wrote in his autobiography, *Black Boy*, which has become one of my models: "If this country can't find its way to a human path, conduct a deeper sense of life . . . all of us are going down the same drain. Humbly now with no vaulting dream of achieving a vast unity, I wanted to try to build a bridge of words between me and the world outside, hurl words into darkness and wait for an echo, and if an echo sounded, I would send other words to tell, to march, to fight, to create a sense of the hunger for life that gnaws in us all, to keep alive in our hearts a sense of the inescapable human."

Governor, that is so powerful and beautifully put. What if our work were ideas that we tossed into the air, and expected to be received because people recognized their real hunger for life and wanted to keep alive those impulses of the inescapable human?

But my fear is the people can't hear anymore above the discordant dissonances that have become normative. I guess, while I say a lot when I write and ramble, it is as well a symptom of my fears, needing to comfort myself in a space that is unfamiliar.

I'd love to have the honor to be able to speak with you about some of this, as we watch, work, and wait for the meanings of our culture and politics to align again, harmonically.

My best,
William Banfield

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“YOU REALLY SHOULD GIVE ME SOME MONEY”

“**Y**ou really should give me some money.” My mother would say this, near to the close of her life. I just figured she was being an old lady. She would tell me this and I shrugged it off as she was growing a bit loopy in old age, well in her eighties. But what she was really saying in a clear mind and intent was that she had prepared me and paved a path to my professional successes, and that “I owed her.” I mean, I loved my mother, and I celebrated and credited her for imbuing me with values and stuff, and praised her for being the world’s greatest mom. She and my dad were such supportive parents. But what I did not do, nor did I recognize her for, was acknowledge her professional accomplishments. I took this aspect of my mother’s many years as a business professional for granted, opting consciously to love her as my mother—which, on the surface and even deeper, is the important thing. But in life, it’s the other things that hang us up. My mother hung onto this idea.

She had long been over the mother part, but what she was most proud of was her contribution to building community programs and her work as a career newspaper woman and public relations expert. As a young musician I never made the connect.

Now I write, I host radio shows, and I run cultural programming that my mother would have advised on, but she is no longer here and I’ll never be able to call on her expertise.

Anne Banfield, my mother, was the public relations director for one of the nation’s largest Black newspapers. A college-trained professional secretary and legal assistant for two prominent Black attorneys in the 1940s, after marrying my father in 1946 and having three sons, she began at the *Michigan Chronicle* and became a career newspaper person, serving as its public relations director from 1961 to 1977. She called herself a child of the Depression, born and raised in Detroit in 1925.

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I remember vividly her stories of working-class parents who migrated from the South at the century's opening during early waves of the Black southern migration north. She spoke of "Black Bottom" in Detroit where Black businesses, hotels, and entertainment venues thrived down on Hastings Street on the city's east side.

She spoke of poverty in the North, of the way her father had to fight off rats by nailing tin cans in the closet floors to hold off the rodent advance into the children's rooms. The one story of awaking and the large rodent biting her in the eye horrified me for years—and still does. So that my parents attended and dressed to the nines to attend President John F. Kennedy's inauguration in 1961 is a real story that resonated.

Her mother, my grandmother, was of the old ways and days of the South in Atlanta as a teacher at Spellman College.

But Mom, as a graduate of Lewis Business College, Wayne State University of Detroit, began her early professional life in the early 1940s as a paralegal for two Detroit prominent attorneys. After raising children, right after the war, her association brought her to working at one of the nation's largest Black newspapers, the *Michigan Chronicle*. But it was her community development programs that won her a string of awards, respect, and admiration as one of Detroit's most loved local PR ladies.

Detroit's Beautiful Block Club, Christmas Lighting Contest, and Church Woman of the Year were all my mother's citywide programs that I well remember attending as a kid. Those awards also included Best Circulation Promotion and Community Service Award (1975), National News Publishers Association Award, and a listing in *Who's Who in Black America*.

As an administrator my mother had two sayings that floored me every time she said them, and here again they are the things I most depend upon in my professional work.

"Plan your work and work your plan, baby," was one of her sayings. There isn't anything I do that does not come to order without this self-directive in mind.

And this is the number one advice I give to students and any dear colleague who needs encouragement.

Secondly, I used to in fun, as a grown man, protest to her about her advocating more or spending more time involved in one of my older siblings' problems or interests. "Ma, you seem to be more concerned with my broth-

ers than me these days.” She would answer, in the most democratic and reassuring way, “Now, sweetheart, I give every child what’s needed according to their needs.” That to me was the hippest answer you could tell somebody. That was one of those Bible Jesus lines where he would satisfy and quell the concerns of the complaining Sadducees, Pharisees, the magistrates, priests, and the people with one caring and critical swipe. Anne was something else.

As a child I would sometimes be at the *Michigan Chronicle*, nestled nicely near downtown, and just around the corner from my high school, Cass Tech. The *Chronicle*, housed in a handsome Black-owned, two-story building at 479 Ledyard Street, was laid out like a traditional newsroom in the “old style back in the day” of the 1960s and 1970s.

I would slide down the huge wood-shellacked banisters that seemed to wrap around two flights of stairs up from the reception desk, upward, upward.

The *Michigan Chronicle* was like a wonderland of people, faces, and busy talk about important things the Black grown-up people were involved in, news stuff. In the newsroom upstairs, there were desks, not cubicles, each with writers all tapping away on typewriters and slamming that old return bar, and you’d hear the click, click and that return bell that punctuated the end of every phrase ending.

You got the sense of the deadlines and stories everyone was working on. Clark Kent and Jimmy would fly in any moment with news of sighting a Black Superman flying overhead, kicking some crime ass downtown. My mother was like a Black Lois Lane—not running the stories down, but editing them down. As my dad, moving into year 90, told me the other day, “She was a spark plug down there! She got them directed, forward thinking. Your mother knew all the socialites in the Black community. The important people were the women. They were wives of the doctors, lawyers, educators, like that.

“Those people looked to Anne to report on that, she could get those kinds of stories in the paper. She was the proofreader too for the major society and culture pieces. She proofread ad copy, press releases, other people’s columns, and program development.

“As well as the director of public relations, she was able to mentor all kinds of younger reporters, writers.”

I remember all through my college years her advice, support, and encouragement, but I remember them coming from Mom. And even

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as I pursued my doctorate and fussed with her about career choices over contracts, and especially our arguments about music management and publicity, I too often dismissed her critical comments as “Mommy knows best,” only words, when I could have taken her more seriously.

So now when I think about it, she just wanted me to give her some respect and recognition that she was not only my mom but my biggest fan, cheer squad, and business advisor off to the side. I think she felt her help landed me some gigs—and she was probably right.

I just couldn’t see it then that I actually had a management team at home.

Her teaching has sustained me, and as I hold onto my professional ground, plan my work, and work my plan, I need to pay respect to Anne for modeling how I now stand on those plans.

Thanks, Mom, I appreciate you.

Bill Banfield Story: Rocket Man

Biography is important. These are stories about humans who lived and touched lives and made our world. In my own case, I was blessed to be brought up in a “golden cultural era” with two parents who lived fully and were prepared from the era before me. This informs me deeply. Both parents sat down and recounted their lives directly to me as I wrote down what they said. This is my dad’s story. I was greatly moved by his telling.

My father was born in Detroit, 1924. He met my mom, Anne Lou Tucker, in their teen years in high school on a skating date. He remembers asking her, “Do you want to skate, little girl?” That was it. But then Dad was drafted in the U.S. Army, War World II, in 1943 at 19 years old. Before he left, he was hired at Ford Motor Company. William Banfield Sr. served in the U.S. Army in the South Pacific in an all-Black regiment. He was the bugle master. At war’s end, he returned back home in 1946 and immediately married Anne in May. She planned their wedding while he was away in the war. Dad returned to Ford Motor Company, but then was laid off in six months. A son, Duvaughn Douglas, was born in 1948, then a second, Bruce Carlton, in 1951, and a very late third boy, me, was born, William Cedric, in 1961. My parents were married 63 years before her very unexpected passing in 2009.

Dad job-shopped in machine shops for die design (machine shop presses) and did everything to feed the family—washing cars, shining

shoes for “pennies.” He wanted to go into school to finish training in engineering. In Cass Technical High School of Detroit, he was enrolled in the Aeronautical Design Department. He graduated in 1942. He was the only Black kid in that whole department for four years. His classes were physics, math labs, and all that kind of stuff.

So they would allow him to go to the training school, on a full G.I. bill, but not let him attend with the White boys. He had to attend on Saturdays.

Then he was introduced to a German designer, John Broaden, an inventor, in 1951. Dad said, “He wasn’t caring about me being Black, he hired me in his shop in Hamtramck, Michigan. My workbench was right in the front window so all the people saw me working. I was his draftsman, just like my eldest son, Duvaughn, whom I trained.”

He continued, “Mr. Broaden would give me his mechanical sketches, then I would make the plans for the screw machine he invented. When I finished the design, we would take them over to a factory for manufacturing. I was the only Black there. Mr. Broaden would introduce me as his draftsman. They were real nice to me.

“Then in 1956, I got the job working for the city, Detroit Lighting Commission. That was a good job. Me and another guy made the master design boxes that controlled the light changes on the traffic crossings. Then in 1957, I was hired at Chrysler Missile plant.”

He continues. “I was born to the parents Carrie and Chester Banfield and was one of six siblings: Mattie, Chester, Bernice, Nora, and me, little Billy boy, plus one unnamed stillborn. My family came to Detroit from Dublin, Georgia, in the Great Northern Migration. They settled in the part of Detroit called ‘Black Bottom,’ down near the Detroit River. My grandfather, born into slavery (approximately 1860) was called Moses and his wife, Odessa, was half Blackfeet Indian. Moses finally got his whole family up north, five sons and four daughters. Being a good man and excellent provider, he found a job at Malleable Iron, a steel smelting foundry.

“All of his sons were hired. The work was hard and hot, so Granddad found another better job at what is now called Waterworks Park.

“Granddad was struck in the head by a moving crane hook and died. To this day it is said that over the massive gate of the Waterworks Park down on Jefferson Avenue, one can make out a memorial name of Moses.

“The grammar school years were pretty much easy for me, but not for my mom, who was by now a single mom. She later tried to explain

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to me that my father just up and left her to raise four kids. My earliest recollection of a horrid night was the time that my oldest sister, Mattie, was stabbed to death on our front porch by her boyfriend. Whatever happened to him, I don't know. The good memories are the ones of the many Christmas times when the 'Old News Boys and the Good Fellows' would go from door to door delivering Christmas boxes to the children in the houses in our neighborhood. It was said that only the good little boys and girls got the Christmas boxes. As a youngest, I would read adventure books like the one on the Haitian revolt. It was through the fearlessness and bravery of one man called Toussaint l'Ouverture that I was most inspired. He defeated and drove the French Army out to sea, wherein they sailed back to France.

"Every week we had to give a book report on what we had read to the class verbatim. Myself and a cutie girl won to represent our school.

"The George Washington Grammar School held a dinner for us at the Masonic Temple. This was an annual affair hosted by the American Legions Group. A three-inch bronze medal was presented to all the city-wide participants. For the next thirty years I cherished that medal.

"My junior high school teacher recommended that I apply to the prestigious Cass Tech high school. I was accepted and to this day Detroiters' eyebrows are raised when you mention that you are a Cass Tech graduate.

"As I was deeply recalling through this long pass of incidents in my life, it occurred to me that they were so many buried significant parts in me that now, somehow, I am trying to awaken. Take, for instance, a little thing like chocolate ice cream. I went to a store to have some ice cream as a kid, and the old White drugstore man refused to let me buy vanilla.

"He said, 'being representative as a Black boy, you should always ask for chocolate ice cream instead of vanilla.' Unconsciously to this day, I can't enjoy fully chocolate ice cream.

"The LienTempco Co., who won the missile contract against Chrysler Missile Corporation of Michigan back in 1963, employed me. I was hired as part of a team of their missile engineers sent to Dallas, Texas, to integrate and interface at their local airplane manufacturing facility. This for me was a great opportunity for this 'northern born and bred individual,' me, to experience that frightening South. My folks, long ago, sent their family from Dublin, Georgia, up to Detroit, Michigan, so what can I say but it was a great opportunity for me, yes, to meet the ugly thing called segregation.

“YOU REALLY SHOULD GIVE ME SOME MONEY”

“In one of Dallas’s first-run theaters downtown, I can recall the time when the great piece of ‘federal mandated open occupancy in all public places’ happened, and I was down there in ’63 when it came down.

“I wanted to see Jerry Lewis starring in *The Nutty Professor*. There I was, bold northern-born me, sent to the South to help the U.S. during the missile crisis. The theater ticket-booth lady gave me my ticket without even looking, and I went inside and comfortably seated myself to enjoy the flick. About half an hour, I guess the word got around that a Black was actually inside the theater! First time!

“They sent ushers to try and handle the situation. One young man very politely asked, ‘How did you get into this theater, as we don’t have any place for colored people to sit in the show. We can refund your ticket money, or if you like we can find a place in the back that would be much better (safer) for you.’ I said, ‘Okay,’ and spent the rest of the movie isolated in the back of the show. When it was all over I was politely escorted to the street safely.

“My wife, Anne, was not happy and called me a ‘big dangerous dummy.’ Anne and I were able to in 1965 to attend after this the inaugural celebrations in D.C. for President Johnson. And they wrote about us in the newspaper. Don’t get me wrong; a lot of good came from my employment with Chrysler Missile Division. I was chosen to represent the company in their ‘minority recruitment program,’ under another federally funded mandate. This was in the late 1960s, and they sent me to a black college, Southern University of Louisiana. To say the least, it was an eye-opener and indeed an honor to come to these young undergraduates as a person of color representing this truly northern corporation. Here I am, a living and breathing individual, telling them that they could come north and be interviewed for a job! To my great surprise, one of the graduating class members did submit a resume to Chrysler Missile Division in Detroit, Michigan, and was hired.

“It is fascinating to look back now on my life and ‘let yourself’ know again how you encountered things like this with people you knew, to dwell on how it happened and why.

“I remember too the time when Anne, my wife, and I took our first trips in the 1970s, sponsored by the Chrysler Management Club, to Europe. We left out of New York and we landed at Streifel’s airport in Amsterdam, the largest airport in Europe. We landed with the group,

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Chrysler Management Club. I was by now a member. The group consisted of about 200 people, all up and ready to go to Amsterdam to see the sights and hotels. We were split into several groups and all headed for our trip down the Rhine River.

“In the intervening years, my life has touched on several social and religious community activities, such as a deacon for more than twenty-five years of the Second Baptist Church of Detroit, the oldest Black church in Michigan, whose basement was the last stop on the Underground Railroad, then off to Canada.

“An active social reformer all of my life, I look back at one of the most outstanding parts I played, which was in missile and rocket development. The Redstone and Lance missiles were never used in a military manner. Under my supervisor, Dole Ryeon, I was privileged to work on the design of the nose cone of the space reenter vehicle. I never realized that I might have been one the first of my race to be called ‘a rocket scientist.’ With Chrysler Corporation for thirty-three years, I visited with many Chrysler facilities around the country helping to solve problems with a group of engineers. I did this armed with a just a bachelor’s degree, which I finally finished in mechanical engineering from Central Michigan University (1975), and which I earned with my G.I. bill. I retired in 1988.

“I have lived a fun filled, wonderfully blessed life, and helped as many as I could, utilizing my lifelong experience to build things and to better lives.”

On June 2, 2014, we celebrated the “rocket man,” our father’s 90th birthday with family, in his hometown of Detroit, Michigan. Henry Louis Gates sent the following:

Dear Bill,

On behalf of our editors in chief, Professors Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Evelyn Higginbotham, both of Harvard University, we are delighted to add your father, the engineer William J. Banfield, as an entry in the African American National Biography.

Published by Oxford University Press (USA), the AANB is the largest and most comprehensive biographical dictionary of the black experience in America.

Our project, as you know, covers a wide range of African Americans who have shaped the nation’s history in many ways. We are particularly keen to include entries on notable engineers, scientists, and medical

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professionals, and we look forward to adding your father’s biography to that growing list. If you have any further questions, I would be happy to address them.

Best regards,
Hutchins Center for African and African American Research
Harvard University
104 Mt. Auburn Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

Affirmations, Symphony 10: The After-Concert Notes of a Composer

The performance, the creative process, and the development of *Symphony 10: Affirmations* have been nothing but one of the greatest creative-art collaborative experiences I have had as a musician. Let’s begin with the opening night—no, with the rehearsals leading up to the premiere. I arrived three days before the premiere of *Affirmations*, performed by the National Symphony Orchestra and Sweet Honey in the Rock at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. These two creative forces alone were enough to boil the excitement pots in the heart. Add to this the incredible Morgan State University Choir. As with most symphonic works, there is a rehearsal, giving composers an opportunity to hear the work for the first time, provide “notes” and suggestions for the premiere to the 100 players, and give some creative insights to the conductor. Then, it’s “on.”

With the performance of *Affirmations*, there were three rehearsals, two of which were dedicated entirely to just refinement and some fine-tuning of the new symphony. This never happens. All the jitters around whether the piece will be executed the way you intended were taken away. That is huge! Next, many family members and friends came, which is rare, because people cannot always travel to hear symphony performances in other cities. My nearing 90-year-old dad was in attendance, all dressed up and looking like he was 55! Maestro Thomas Wilkins led the National Symphony Orchestra in works by Adolphus Hailstork, Leonard Bernstein, Duke Ellington, and Tchaikovsky. The second half was entirely devoted to the *Affirmations* symphony. It was an incredible and fabulous

opening. This concert was repeated on the next evening. The board of directors also threw a huge party for friends, family, and symphony donors on the roof garden of the Kennedy Center!

It was a lovely April 13 and 14 in 2012.

Composer's Notes

A higher note, *Dream, Yes, The Day the World Awoke*, and *Discourse on Change* as titles are thought provoking and creative, and provide some insights and comment on the spirit of the work. Consider Beethoven's Ninth, its relationship to Schiller's evocative text pointing at the theme of global brother/sisterhood and enlightenment ideals. These mirror in many ways the Affirmation texts by the world's leading performance ensemble of singing poets, Sweet Honey in the Rock.

The ladies of Sweet Honey in the Rock approached me in the summer of 2005 at the retirement party for author Toni Morrison, yet another provocative intersection in text and meaning. Enter in several interested orchestras, but then the crash and fall of financial markets in 2009, the work was put on hold. Our *Affirmations* symphony has within its journey more than poetry and themes to mark its meaning. Beethoven had created his *Ninth Symphony* and dedicated its sounding to ideas in the world, and in these ways imagined, imposed or real, I was moved too by the merging of music and ideas.

Yet another consideration was how to approach and navigate the often ill-balanced formula of American modern composers' yields to the pull of a European aesthetic, and the equal lure and pulling aesthetic of popular modern feels, styles, and forms. Adding yet another layer is the audience expectation of hearing and seeing that which they love about Sweet Honey. Affirmations are at once an affirmation of what we reached for in ideals and ideas and the reach for meaning and acceptance.

Musically I strove to set first these powerful poems. Secondly, I wanted to serve the soloist/authors, each of whom not only has a musical voice and performing approach, but also approached the text with particular attention to as broad an idea as Schiller's global humanity, but as well individual empowerment, community accountability, social and civic critique, and a prescriptive discourse on change. Not only that, but this piece was being conceived during a heady moment of dramatic political change: namely, the rise and election of President Barack Obama.

The next task was to find musical poetic/harmonies, rhythms, structures, and forms that would complement the ladies’ poignant words. I have never loved Beethoven so much as I do today; that great rhythmic, poetic, melodic sonorous, emotive force in music has provided me with so many figures and frames on which to feast. My own harmonies I worked over and through my searching fingers, reflecting on my years of symphonies, operas, and chamber jazz, funky fugues and songs were now all at once realigned with this strong tradition. And yet I still must reckon with the sacred and powerful forms of African American choral tradition, a repertoire that has been constantly singing in my ears since I was a child, and to this day, I dare not deny its power and scope.

I had to live, listen, learn, and then dance constantly with these parameters, through all of which my own artistic voice tussled. I think any artist struggles to not choke on and in their egos. How will my work live? Who will listen, who will hear when I am no longer there to listen?

We want our work to live, longly. How will “they” judge this? *Affirmations: Symphony 10* is stepping out as the text asks for a “higher note,” to redefine the traditions in our art that need new fueling. That balance challenged Stravinsky, Picasso, Ellington, Mary Lou Williams, Ornette Coleman, as much as all of us assembled here tonight to listen, sing, and be in the spray of live, modern music in a concert hall. Yet we affirm that music is an important work of enlightenment, delight, and meaning as any endeavor we jointly participate in together at once. Music sung can sing of the possibilities of the human endeavor.

An affirmation affirms every great human power we have: love, imagination, fear, and courage, will to change, dreaming, to ask the question, to touch someone else’s soul. To have a higher note, dream, belief in the yes, ponder the day the world awakes, again, and to have a discourse on change—these are evocative and provocative as one journeys to figure out what are our possibilities in the tangle of life. Affirmations are songs and musical expressions that sing together this kind of human experience with reckoning. We hope you hear, sing, and enjoy.

In addition to the notes, I think there is also something to be shared about the process of the pulling together of the work. It begins with the poetry, from the ladies of Sweet Honey. I basically had to live in their words, even before a note was written. Setting poetry to music is the most time-consuming work—detailed and intensive for me. You have to

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“musicalize” the poetry, from flat words to sounding musical pitches, and pour those into a song form that carries the spirit and drama of the poetry. While some of this is subjective, a really well-set piece speaks musically, spiritually, and emotively to the poem’s desires and meanings. In order to do this, you have to live with the poetry. Once that is done and the song is written, you have to then orchestrate the work for 100 players, including sections of strings, winds, brass, and percussion. While this may seem to be the most daunting of the tasks, it is for me the most fun. Orchestration is like inviting the right friends to your home, decorating the rooms, cooking the specialty dishes, and then laying it all out.

It’s construction, cooking, baking, and decorating all at once. Music “sounds in the voice of instruments.” You have to cast the piece well, so it sounds good and is effective.

The other challenge is making sure you have the right style and tempo, and the balances are right so the voices are not overpowered by all the instruments.

Then there was rehearsing with Sweet Honey. Oh, boy! Sweet Honey in the Rock has been together for 40 years! How do you approach such a veteran-performing ensemble? How do you “teach them” the music, then direct them? Most times, performers are very grateful for a composer to give them the essentials of the music. So the collaboration and sharing happened for us immediately.

One other essential for this collaboration was the vocal coaching. The fabulous Marvin Mills of Maryland assisted in working through my vocal/piano rehearsal scores, and shaping the ladies over the year. There was also the incredible Eric Conway, principal director of the Morgan State choirs, who worked with the 100 voices. By the time (the rehearsing and prep, which took about a year) the work was to be mounted, we were all on the same pages. Everything went like timed clockwork. After the Kennedy Center, the next week we were off to Minneapolis for a performance with the Minneapolis Symphony in Minnesota. Again, the house was packed and the orchestra performed marvelously. The symphony had another performance in Chicago, November 2012, with the Sphinx Virtuoso Orchestra, Chicago Symphonia, and the Chicago Children’s Choirs. I guess if there was one thing I remember the most, it was sitting there in the audience, watching the people being moved by not only the ladies’ incredible artistry, but also the spirit of the work, how that “went

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inside” the people, and you could see it, and feel it, “in the house.” Music, I always say, is more than music. It’s an experience of living sounded out on tones that reflect people’s ideas, love, needs, and imagination. Affirmations have marked my creative life tremendously. In other words, I have been Affirmed.

Part III
CULTURE
New Standards, Cultural Critique

With unbelievable patience, its writers and poets tried to explain to us that our values and the true facts of their lives did not hang together, and that they could neither reject them nor yet assimilate them. . . . "Let us waste no time in sterile litanies and nauseating mimicry. Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all the corners of the globe. For centuries they have stifled almost the whole of humanity in the name of a so-called spiritual experience." . . . "Europe now lives at such a mad, reckless pace that she is running headlong into the abyss; we would do well to keep away from it."

—*The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon

Cultural criticism is about a conscious choice to search and ask for a balance and account of what things matter in the mind, soul, and society. But it's a difficult walk. It can be preachy or heady, and there is always the danger of alienation, passing judgment and pointing fingers. But among contemporary protest and cultural studies circles, it is the banner of the truth for and by the people that counts, and calls down truth to the powerful. In Black writing traditions of creative cultural criticism, from the beginning of the 20th century onward, such works as *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* by James Weldon Johnson, *The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* by Harold Cruse, *Breaking Bread (Insurgent Black Intellectual Life)* by bell hooks and Cornel West all critique strongly societal norms, and speak in house to cultural issues, problems, and values of select communities.

Cultural criticism is critical because among all the media noise about sometimes tangential moment-to-moment news bites, there are the

PART III

longer systemic and societal pathologies and cyclical spirals inward and downward that writers call attention to. That's not easy work because no one ever seems to listen. But those writings pour out powerfully.

These essays and conversations draw our attention to two areas: social struggles and creative strivings in contemporary society.

CHAPTER TWELVE
WAKE UP! WHAT TIME IS IT REALLY?
WHO TURNS IT UP, DOWN, AND BACK?
Values on the Cultural Dial

We are sorely in need of the clarity and inconvenient truths that art allows us to tell, the conversations it sparks, the space for emotion that it makes, the questions it poses, the pressure points in an aching national body politic that it exposes. . . . It is art, our ability to sit with art and all the possibilities it helps us to imagine, that is so important to our ability to value. . . . But under conditions of neoliberalism, which favor the unregulated, unchecked reach of huge multinational corporations into every area of our lives, art and music and the people who produce them all become merely marketable commodities.

—Brittney Cooper, Women’s and Gender Studies and
Africana Studies, Rutgers University

Our cultural directions, our societal norms, and our standards in all ways are best determined ultimately by the generation who can determine a society’s path forward to a future. If that is true, our time spent now is best rewarded with how we engage in nurturing young people and partnering with them in the caretaking of the culture.

The entire purpose and premise of this piece is to focus on the importance of encouraging young people in our culture to be empowered toward excellence. To do this, we as a community, a society, must be wary of systemic practices, “cultural spirals,” and popular cultural projections, images, and practices that block such forward movement, which are largely manufactured by commoditizing industries. I underscore the point with the statement that most things qualified by somebody else—things not determined by our own sense of intrinsic worth or value—largely determine what is considered “good,” “cool,” and “lovely.” I make the argument that creative agency must trump consumer complacency.

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The problem is today we hear and value less the articulation of a cultural critique and challenge of the pop status quo by those young citizens whose right it is to say and demand more.

As I read the viewpoints of artists over the decades, they are always concerned about at least these things: their music and artistry, how it will survive, how it represents, how it relates to other artists' workings and styles, how the culture and society reads and responds to their art, and how their artistry will survive in that culture or society.

In short, cultural criticism is essentially a part of what we do as artists.

I guess, honestly, I've seen "youth Black popular culture" largely tipped on the hip-hop side, in a kind of "all angry, gangsta-mean, keeping it ghetto, real machine." I just think there needs to be more balance in what we are seeing being expressed as Black contemporary youth identity.

In advanced societies it is not the race politicians or the "rights" leaders who create the new ideas and the new images of life and man. That role belongs to the artists and intellectuals of each generation.

—Harold Cruse

I would send other words to tell, to march, to fight, to create a sense of the hunger for life that gnaws in us all, to keep alive in our hearts a sense of the inexpressibly human.

—Richard Wright

Music is supposed to inspire / how come we ain't getting no higher?

—Lauryn Hill

Live a bit and you see a lot. The sea of identity signifiers and megacultural currency today has created a wave of youth style, images, and world-views that leave many of us wondering if our own plainness can stand the weight of its loneliness, back in the day-ness, against the constructed, projected new normalcy of today's more common expressions.

The Main Theme

The permanence of the Internet and the media saturation of youth commercial culture many times have us by the proverbial throat, strangled

and even coughing up lots of blood. I raise this idea before us: Who turns the values on the cultural dial up, down, and back? Who can share perspectives from the creative and process part of the equation that allows us equally to more critically examine the meaning and the mattering of commercial music products and entertainment in today's marketplace? What prompted this essay was an Internet posting titled "What's Killing Our Culture?" which was featured on one of Mark Anthony Neal's ferocious and fluid enterprises, addressing our misplaced blame on hip-hop for tight and baggy jeans, among other things. As to an option for how to alter aspects of popular youth culture, any of us older people do not really matter. I say, let the hip-hop community, the entertainers, speak about their own fast flight, falls, failures, and potential refining, and set the new fabulous finishing and continuous lines, and even meaning and values. The problem I have with the "hip-hop bandwagon cultural criticism" is it lacks consideration of creative process. Books and media apparatus are many times just "hot topic" moments. Scholarship about culture and entertainment needs to be substantive and sustainable but must also inform and be interested in the art forms and forums of music and creative expression and culture.

I read many cultural critic opinions riding high on the waves of selective advocacy for all hip-hop culture.

It tires me and bores because too many of these commentaries—even if they are from Dr. Somebody who has a book out or teaches a class in a college—are reacting far too late actually. There are no ripe and ready apologies for our current cultural participation in foolishness, whether it's the media, young people, or inept artistry that gets projected as the last act or song standing.

The Dissonant Note

As to baggy jeans, especially the ones that hang so low you can see underwear—I'm sorry, I must say, I live in urban America. I ride the public train every day. Anyone who still tries to defend pants hanging down, skin busting out from everywhere, and ignore youth anger, aggravation, youth angst, and anxiety in popular culture and the "mainstream" hip-hop swag is blind to the weight of cultural chaos on our young people and has their head buried in holes. We all need to wake up

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and not defend the cultural spirals we see ourselves in, the old and the young. In many cases, our communities are as much the problem as the media or the marketplace that provides the silent support for so much of destructive culture.

Let's be clear, when anyone speaks about problematic aspects of contemporary music culture, they are not talking about being loud, loose, or unladylike. Hip-hop is Black music culture, but that's not what people are screaming about. Hip-hop didn't create any of this madness, it—just like all the other entertainment voices—is stuck carrying it. Today, the stuff we have at our fingertips is too much and over the top. It's a saturated shelf of things that we race to, and when we pull all the stuff down off the shelf onto ourselves, we are simply left digging through the piles.

Billy Corgan of the Smashing Pumpkins recently stated that “Modern technology, media, has lowered, degraded the price point We've lost the graduated rational decision of what music is worth. Music and popular culture have become a service culture. People no longer trust the price point you are giving them.”

I think this also leaves people desensitized and simply looking for any old thing that's the next thing to look at. Further, in culture and music, popular entertainment in particular has been diminished to a commoditized, media-fed, disposable, “onto the next flavor of the month thing.” And so no wonder today it's all wild and freestyle with no common sense of judgment, value, what's good, in poor taste, or acceptable or not.

Too many of our debates are fueled and informed by “misguided popular/media cultural hot air,” which provides very little information about the matters, the meaning, the practice, or the process of music making or other sustainable and meaningful cultural expressions. Media heads only know how music and entertainment are measured and weighed commercially on the mainstream market scale. Time to allow the artists, educators, thinkers, and practitioners in music and arts to speak out about what drives and determines contemporary musical culture and entertainment art. Today's mainstream popular trends—such as piercing, tattoos, gold teeth, weaves, underwear showing, hot tight jeans, or whatever some nonmusician producer thinks in participation with the mainstream entertainment and media monster—have very much to do with where we are megaculturally.

This poisonous partnership in terms of stylistic tenets of everyday expressive culture also has very little to do with where we can be going, re-

ally. Largely, these entertainment figures don't create culture, they simply manufacture a mess of commercially saturated pop. Don't misread me on this. Every generation creates its own beloved pop-youth culture, and it's never loved or appreciated fully by older people or cultural snobs, nor am I saying popular culture needs to save the world in every song. Popular culture is supposed to be fun, young, and rebellious too.

That is not what I am taking about here. There is vibrant, relevant contemporary popular culture and expression and there is trash—and every generation knows the difference. The problem is today we rarely hear and value less the articulation of a cultural critique and challenge of the pop status quo by those young citizens whose right it is to say and demand more. When I feel myself slipping into passing judgment or being an old fart, I shake myself first. Now that I have slapped myself, I am awake, but the nightmare we walk in daily is that we have become complacent and lowered our humanity codes to such a low level as citizens and consumers, that everything now is OK, and ushered in under the baseless excuse of “free speech,” “youth culture,” “entertainment value,” “keeping it real,” or “everything is a party.” Really? Really? We need to wake up and do a Michael Jackson and to “look in the mirror.”

One of the points I want to raise, which could be incorrect, is that not enough is being brought to the table from a critical creative perspective. In other words, my concern is that in terms of the impact of popular culture on shaping our current cultural dynamics, we are not holding creative people accountable. We are simply talking about the commercial after-products and their measure as commodities.

There is little talk about the intrinsic meaning, worth, or the process of creative expression that bears the weight of and impact of commerciality and yet needs to redefine commerciality. And so we spin all these postcausative reasons, and more time in my way of thinking should be exploring critically why we accept the decline of our megasocietal values and the lessening of craft and education.

We clearly have a weakened industry infrastructure that is blindly looked to for manufacturing art, culture, and entertainment with value—but the industry and media are “pop pimps” and are clearly bereft of art, culture, and music and entertainment value. So this is the reason too many of our contemporary popular expressions hang in front of us so empty and thinly conceptualized.

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Again, it is this sharing of the creative and process part of the equation that allows us to more thoroughly question commercial music product in the marketplace. For example, there are few critical rebellious commercial/popular voices today that matter. Bob Dylan was a voice. Bessie Smith was a voice. Woody Guthrie was, Tupac was, Green Day, Arrested Development, and both John Legend and Alicia Keys are powerful meaning griots in the Donny Hathaway, Nina Simone song tradition. These are a few examples of commercial artists who were not in revolt from fringes but actively invested in mainstream popular messages and materials. Our times lack courage. People are content to let too much slide, so we all settle for less, and silence becomes comfortable and expected.

I love the movie *The Matrix*. Morpheus asks Neo: “Do you believe in fate, Neo?” Neo says, “No.” “Why not?” Morpheus asks. Neo responds, “Because I don’t like the idea that I’m not in control of my life.” Morpheus responds, “I know exactly what you mean.” He continues, “What you know, you can’t explain, but you feel it. When you go to work, to church, when you pay your taxes. . . . You can’t explain it, like a splinter in your mind driving you mad. . . . It’s the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth. . . . That you are a slave, born into a prison for your mind.”

Morpheus offers two pills, and Neo takes the pill for truth. Take the red pill, people!

Black Music Matters

In specific historical real terms, Black music has always mattered from many angles. It mattered socially, culturally, historically, and artistically. What song in rotation at this moment today can you name that matters artistically, socially, historically, and aesthetically? You get my point. I remember as a youngster hearing pride songs, spiritual songs, political songs, funky shake-your-butt songs, silly songs, and serious songs, and, oh yes, love songs. It all mattered, and it all shaped me. People, it seems until very recently, expected to hear a broader range of ideas going on, and they expected this from young artistry. Of course there is the Internet, and it has definitely provided options other than mainstream madness.

The music in every period I remember always mattered and meant things: “I Love Rock and Roll,” “Born in the USA,” “The Message” (It’s

like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder”). Popular culture has got to mean something again, and in that shared value moment, there is a sustainable reckoning of sorting worthwhile entertainment and things to compare, and so the buying public can distinguish and make better choices, because they care about what the purchase means and how it matters to them. That’s a conscious choice, not just another sales selection. When we become less defined by complacency and cultural sleepwalking, we will restart a fresh way toward cultural redefinitions.

New Angles in Popular Music Culture

None of this will ever get you famous or rich. Most of our talk will not be seen by many, but you still have to put a note out there to make the chord. These ideas frame a set of questions, presuppositions, and searches about the meanings of expression and the practices of music and art. If you think about Ralph Ellison (author of *Invisible Man*, among other works), he was a composer who landed in New York and thought his music couldn’t get off the ground, but his writing from that artistic angle did. Of course, he went on to write one of the greatest books on identity known in American literature. So the idea of bringing musicians’ and artists’ ideas into the open in dialogue, not being invisible, is a rallying call.

How are the new songs, grooves, new aesthetics being formulated as we speak by the current generation of artists and thinkers, and who are they? And what does their art say, mean? We are in search of the next window that illuminates and we are looking to hear about the new narrative forward. Music deserves attention today, and certainly a lot of noise is made around the music, but when does the music that gives us so much get properly attended to? Without working out a wrestle down of these questions, hopefully the answers come back from young artists. Without this, all we do is a selfish and old fuss that is lost in its own boxed definition of what used to work.

The cages of what used to work can’t be unlocked by pretending the bars aren’t there or that what we hear out there will now suddenly go away or change keys. There must be an unlocking of the cages to move forward. Some wise friend once retorted, “Yes, but artists must always be true to themselves. Chasing a paradigm for the sake of chasing a paradigm is a treacherous and false design. We perform the music and sounds that we like, whether it is fashionable or not.” Even with the greatest of intentions

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for cultivating a high standard of creative agency, the first stop is always popular music. The people live for popular music.

People have requiems and funeral marches for the dead, but the people live on popular music everywhere in the world. So you have to make some decisions to address that music first if we are addressing the music in society.

Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes wrote each other all the time about everything they were thinking. These young artists were using their gifts, opportunities, their creativity, their cultural convictions, explorations, experimentations, and thoughts to preserve and further advance the race, humanity. Many have been talking about the state of music culture, in general. The justification has been that the “major defining” apparatus that defines music in the culture is the media, mega-pop culture and new commodities industries led by the growing technologies that generate music. The concern is that we must partner with this current generation to help define what could be called the “commitment to the care of the culture,” which many of us feel is under attack. And there is a sea change of values, a little more drastic than we expected. This has occurred due to a more pervasive mega-pop culture capitalist presence, technology, societal dehumanization, lack of civility, shifting family structures, and a whole list of social causative factors.

And this is not new; it’s been brewing for a long time and folks have been talking, fussing, and writing about it for a long time. Our culture just looks even more insidious and shaky than before, at least to our eyes and ears. But I feel the human capacity to reach out and think deeper and love bigger will eventually prevail. Such a dialogue together as well allows us to address personal, professional, and philosophical reflections of the next what is, what could, what will be, and how and why and what if?

People who are talking about contemporary music or urban contemporary music must too have the courage and the accountability of their conscience, to step forward and deal with the destruction of our communities, in the count of bodies, minds, values, and social life expectancy.

There are well-intentioned people sitting around tables formulating new agendas, yet we hear no real talk about the problems ingrained culturally in this now-poisoned popular culture apparatus that we call music. It’s like the old Negro spiritual, “all these people talking ‘bout heaven, ain’t going ‘dar.” Until we have reached the point where we can honestly talk about

the music that is projected in today's megaculture and what this means in terms of its cultural and social effects, there is no real movement forward, only in confused circles. Black music, in particular, had always been about the health, meaning, and sustainability of the communities. The music in every form, until just recently, was primarily and principally about that. A cultural studies lens upon contemporary music is necessary to reveal the important components of the meaning of the expressions, images, values, and its distribution effect in terms of cultural, intellectual, sexual, class, race, and gender identities crucial to the balance of our society and culture.

My whole campaign is being honest. What are you really like? What influenced you? Who are you? When you do that, and that's what comes out, that's jazz from your eyes. . . . Jazz, [today] nothing ever happens. It's literally like being at an old-folks home on bingo night, . . . you know? I prefer to be at a party where a fight might break out.

—Robert Glasper

A Funeral Service for Hip-Hop: But Really?

We feel the need to take all the music back, save it, and sustain it through intergenerational collaboration. For example, I know that my generation's music is gone, yet I believe it should have survived and not just been sampled. But the sampling generation came along and took only the “beat part,” and that began to generate a lot of excitement and a lot of cash. The excitement part I get.

The cash part, that game is cancerous. Hip-hop megaculture hit the commercial wall by chaining itself to commercial interests only and it self-destroyed itself. If you could release it from the chains of commercializing and cultural chaos, there could be art again in hip-hop music-poetry culture. But now as it exists, hip-hop music culture is a “commercial monster” that has a bad headache and a soured stomach. I tell my students all the time, “You will hit a ceiling in hip-hop. It can only go so far, so spend more time developing ‘real music’ skills and bring those to hip-hop and turn it back into an art expression that matters because it adds to the human condition, not disrupts and distracts from it.” This never goes over well with younger people because you, in short, are attacking their place of aesthetic values, which to them means everything. So what kind of

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talk, what kinds of music or approaches might bridge and heal this music divide? I don't know.

If you look at the list of papers below from different panels from the 2013 Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association (PCA/ACA) national conference, held in Washington, D.C., you will find young and middle-aged aspiring and established scholars focused on Black music culture presenting papers. What you will not find is any one of them doing Black music. We (Dr. Angela Nelson, Bowling Green University, and I) founded the subject area nearly 10 years ago, and we hoped we would have an area that grew our discussions and explorations deep in the lasting traditions of the variety of Black music subjects.

Each year, we saw the scholars become less interested in traditional blues, jazz, R&B, arts music traditions, and global black music.

That's where we are. Hip-hop as a phenomenon slowly began to be the primary interest of younger scholars dealing across the board in Black American and popular music culture and forms. So, hip-hop as a subject gobbles up all the attention and sucks all the contemporary scholarship up. Why, how, and what does this suggest about the meaning of the music culture and scholarship, and what drives the contemporary culture machinery across the tables of contemporary Black creative expression? This sharing is not an attack on hip-hop or only despair of the generational aesthetic sea change. We have all just been talking about the state of popular music culture, in general.

Black Music Culture/Hip-Hop Culture

Here are the names of some panel presentations at a recent Popular Culture Association conference.

“Scarface the Movie Did More than Scarface the Rapper to Me:
Exploring the Legacy of Scarface in Hip-Hop Music and the
1980s Black Community”

“Just Be Real: Buddy Esquire and Advertising Hip-Hop Authent-
ticity in the Bronx and Beyond”

“Ole Dawg Like Me: The Reggae-Dancehall Dichotomy in Co-
lin Channer’s *Waiting in Vain*”

“Framing the Changes: Notes on Jazz Photography”

- “Idlewild Blues: Visualizing a Southern Ethno-Gothic in Out-Kast’s Idlewild”
- “Arab Hip-Hop in the Era of the Arab Spring: Creating Spaces, Connecting World Subjectivities”
- “John Lee ‘Sonny Boy’ Williamson: The Sound”
- “We Feel that We Have the Responsibility to Shine Light into the Darkness: A Critical Examination of the Politics of ‘Blackness’ in the Album Mos Def and Talib Kweli Are Blackstar”
- “Promise That You Will Sing about Me: Kendrick Lamar’s Good Kid Mad City, Meaning, Orality & Advocacy”
- “White Girl Mobbin’: Blackface, Social Satire, and Hipster Re-Urbanization”
- “Some Do It for the Female, Others Do It for the Retail: A Content Analysis of Top Hip-Hop Songs to Find Differences in Product Placement Based on Rappers’ Gender”
- “‘She Get It from Her Mama’: Generational Effects of Hip-Hop on African-American Women”
- “20 Minutes with Azealia Banks, or How Hip-Hop Got Fierce”
- “Hip Hop as Cultural Capital: Using Critical Race Theory to Affirm Cultural Wealth”
- “Who’s Stirring the Pot? Rap Music”
- “Utilizing the Wu-Tang Clan as a Vehicle to Develop Critical Thinking Skills, Foster Intercultural Dialogue/Communication, and Promote Cultural Sensitivity”
- “Who’s Representing Whom? Deconstructing Race Men, Real ‘Niggas,’ Video Girls, and Bad Bitches in the 21st Century”
- “Whose World Is This?!: Black Girl Emcees and Their (Self) Representation within Digital Video”
- “Bitch Bad, Lady Good, Woman Better: Race Men, the ‘Bad Bitch,’ and the Politics of Respectability”
- “The Origins and Evolution of Hip-Hop through Voloshinov’s Semiotic Theory of Ideology”
- “All My Bitches Bad . . . They Got Amber Cole Swag: Exploring Black Youth Sexual Politics and Oral Fixations through the Emergence of Self-Produced Hip-Hop Music Videos & Sex Tapes Online”

Don't get me wrong: This is not all bad news. As a matter of fact, in many ways the notion and themes of identity, sexuality, representation, and image and power are all some of the most provocative and demanding issues that mark our current times, in term of how we define people living in modern society. Hip-hop and contemporary music, in many ways, best frame these difficult and complex ideas in a form and forum allowing decoding, wrestling with the issues in a language that was "created, made, and mediated" by everyday people, and those everyday artists are young popular culture artists. In this panel scenario, these are young thinking students and professors advocating open discourse in classes and meeting times outside the classrooms, but the subject matters and the voice of the issues are popular artists, connecting on everyday problems of the masses.

This is cultural relevance.

So another challenge becomes: Who decides what's relevant? And who decides what the forum is, and who is involved in the conversations?

Let's Keep This Real

The megacultural projection of our current citizenry codes, what's put out there, has set in place as "normal" some troubling paradigms and mindsets. Due to the elevation of a prison rhetoric and the loss of a generation's innocence, too many young women and men find it acceptable and normative to hear from their music artists, "nigga," "bitches," and wear pants and clothes hanging off, all as acceptable "sway and style." Yes, to some extent, it's the fault of their parents (or lack of parents). But the accountability is on everyone, including the young people who have the brains to make better choices. I remember being 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, and I don't recall anyone ever making excuses for me. If I chose stupid, I was stupid, but I had the mind to choose to be stupid. We had choices, and we were held responsible for those choices.

Today young people have even sharper minds and there are better examples for them, and if they chose to be stupid, well . . . who's fault is that? I have become pleasantly possessed by this calling to explore the meanings in music culture, the lives of music makers, and a look deeper into the activity that shapes and accompanies people's lives in culture. If you care about young people, you have to care about the music. I have

been making music and teaching music for 40 years in public schools and in communities. I've never seen or known young people outside of their involvement and interaction with music.

If the music does not address the problems, the problems don't get sung about; there will be fewer notes that ring out to reach out to and from the people, if the music dies.

Commercialized hip-hop subcultural elements, "ghetto fabulous," "keeping it real," and THUGLIFE (the twisted Tupac acronym for "The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everyone") were commoditized and then fused with contemporary prison rhetoric and gang codes that joined criminality to the hip of the music, despite the music's own attempts to dislodge itself from destructive language, imagery, and behavior. So hip-hop culture bangs its own head against the pavement in this schizophrenic identity of serving the community or souring it. Today the popular music media machine has zero interest in helping to correct or balance this problem because it makes more money projecting hip-hop as a necessary identity of "all Black youth" and all other urban youth—but this is a lie.

As much as it pains me to point a finger at anyone, it has been this union throughout the history of the discussion of Black music and black people that has created today's environment. The two have always been in relation and are inextricably connected. As I have studied and journeyed, it has always equaled and mirrored the people. Urban music is principally about urban people. And sadly, you cannot have this all one-sided. If we talk about the beauty and brilliance of the music, you must talk about the people's living conditions.

If you talk about the devastation of the music, you must talk about the people who are shaking! Many youngsters are trapped by this and have fewer and fewer other strong voices or advocacy points of representation artistically today in mainstream culture. So where do we turn? This is the crime scene. Black musicians who saw themselves as the carriers of the cultural practices and history made black music in past decades.

Today that group of musicians has been mostly silenced in/on mainstream popular culture.

If music made by Black musicianship is directly tied to the living and listening gauges of contemporary youth, what youth music would that be? It certainly is not blues or jazz.

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The music most directly related to this community today is popular music (hip-hop, contemporary R&B, and gospel). Mainstream American popular culture is mostly vapid crap, horrible music, nonsinging, foolish and foul gestures, language of little substance, and a poisoned pathology that destroys potential. The main reason for this is because a musician's community today does not make popular music. Through the access of technology and media-created industry, "others" mostly control most of the channels our music is heard through.

No clubs, no local jukeboxes, no local jazz jam sessions, no local dances in basements, fewer community-based concert venues, all that musicologist Guthrie Ramsey called "community theaters." He writes "all these combine to form living photographs, rich pools of experiences, and a cultural poetics upon which theoretical and analytical principles can be based. By recounting these experiences in detail, I hope to give some idea about how I learned that music possesses a power; in particular, the power to mean something important about the world around me." Additionally, there are fewer local and community-financed festivals, fewer independent music labels, and fewer after-school music training programs.

No apologies offered.

We must do more music to save our communities across regions and cultural groups, and it must be intergenerational. Where there is an increase in that community's commitments to these humanities-related expressions and interactions, there is always an increase in young people's creative extraordinary output, artistically and humanely across the board. That is the fact of the history associated with this music. When older people put their heads in the sand, claiming to support the nonsense of various expressions of today's popular culture block (radio/music, TV, film), they offer no substantive solutions and are a bigger problem in their self-promoting complacency. They hide behind comforting and intellectual presuppositions under the guise of scholarship or activism, and in my opinion are helping sustain long-held stereotypes of cultural confusion. It takes courage to step up; today's "fronting people"—from the church to professors to media headstrongs to politicians—are weak because they offer no progressive and committed leadership focused on challenging the status quo, nor do they offer sustainable models for change. We need more voices to step up and produce in this discourse.

The Internet is somewhat of a balancing option, but it offers as many choices for good as it does “for stupid,” and we are left with “viewer on-demand discretion.” Musicians, as in the past, have to take the stand and make a stand. Now is the time, yet again, and from here on out forward.

I had a friend who was a huge advocate of hip-hop and rap. He would tell me passionately, “If it weren’t for hip-hop my nephews would never be able to deal with the harsh realities of the world they see every day. Hip-hop and rap gives them a forum, a speech, and an artistic framework to analyze, discuss, and come up with remedies.” There are lots of hip-hop advocates. I think it is a matter of the quality of the presentation of ideas, the quality of the rap artists’ flow and content, the music production and the purpose of the art “to do,” that makes any of this count in a discussion about how to qualify hip-hop properly at the level of what’s good music, good art.

Chuck, my cousin and an insider in music/media production, states, “We are the beat Generation. We are concerned with the feel that keeps you moving. We don’t build from the harmonies and melodies, we build from the beat up and float the melodies and harmonies second, because that’s what the people are tapped into. But I study all that music, I know that music and flip it, give you all that tradition, but use it to bring them in a new way.”

“Interesting indeed,” responded Patrice Rushen, noted composer, pianist, recording artist, and producer, chair of Popular Music Studies, USC, in 2013.

This “take” and his concept of “tradition” and “bringing it to them in a new way”? He sounds like a smart young man. Hope he didn’t somehow miss the info and connections having to do with all of it coming from the music of the drum (beat) Africa. The slaves songs were not built on harmonies, the music from the roots of our culture had pretty limited melodic content and harmony through a good deal its early history. There were other influences on the music which become “popular” too. Black music was and remains rhythmically based. Call it whatever you want, but youth and the amazing consistency of the uninformed to assume it starts where they are, is why conversations today and dialogue is so important. It’s a Continuum not a Contest. Are there differences? Sure. Are there trends? Absolutely. One cannot leave out the influences of technology, and the ease of everybody, anybody to get their hands on an instrument of sorts and start “playing.” We have “pitch-correction”

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that's become the signature sound of what is said to be "current." But some exposure and music education or the lack thereof also influences every generation of creative youth's collective voice. It's natural; it's a mirror of the times.

At the same time, it's not out of step or old-fashioned to sing in tune, care about the poetic content of a lyric, play an instrument with a level of mastery, have a sense of the basics of sound and technology, go to rehearsal to work stuff out, then take it to a stage and offer the audience a musical experience. As the relative unimportance of record sales in the millions and the implosion of the "old model" of the music business has occurred, so does the above become more relevant. As more and more people can experience music-making, the artists who do it for the reasons artists do art becomes the nobility of calling oneself a musician. That's because they are in touch with their own passion and purpose. Their love of the art of music has its own reward of that which has to do with the spirituality of mastery and artistry. That pursuit has no boundaries, no categories, no labels, no gender, and requires no "flip" of anything.

Music, film, and Internet interactives are the new deliverables, along with Facebook, Spotify, YouTube, Twitter, and social networks, all bringing content, people, and artists together. How do we make this click? That spirit-soul thing is original, a value placed on self-individuality, contained unto itself with no outside tricks or gimmicks attached.

Today I heard a campaign on the radio for giving people "free professional cameras" so they could pursue their "passions" and turn that into being a professional. Really?!

In a Web video interview with Rude Boy, Smashing Pumpkin artist Billy Corgan said, "It all starts with, 'I'm OK with paying for this thing.' We've lost the graduated rational decision of what music is worth. We've lost the understanding of the value of intrinsic worth."

He continues,

Modern technology, media, has lowered and degraded the price point. So, now people say, "I'm not going to pay for that." . . . Fame has sup-
planted material success. These kids are on perpetual tour because they are hooked on "aspiration lifestyle." They think they are "famous."

I really love how Corgan "gets it," that we are artists with intrinsic value, gifts, and skills, but that now we are being asked to compromise that for a

growing need of market stupidity that benefits empty capitalism—all for the sake of satisfying someone’s broken attention span.

The music itself, rapid motion during this period put Trane into a music so expressive, thrilling, people tuned in to him the reaching, certain dimension, where the people themselves were going. They are the harbingers, reflectors of the same life development. We followed Trane, our own teaching for new definition. And we heard our own search and travails, our reaching for new definition. Trane was our flag. . . . But there were some other, younger, forces coming in at the time and this added still other elements to the music (Ornette, Cecil, Oliver Nelson, Eric Dolphy). There was a newness, defiance, laid out in their music, politically and creatively, it was all connected. It was [as] if the music was leading us.

—Amiri Baraka, 1984, *The Autobiography*

In a recent interview, veteran music producer and label owner Herb Alpert lamented that, with contemporary music culture and technology-produced music, “Too many options. I think it takes some of the heart away.” “In those days we [worked with] signed artists that had their own identity (Sam Cooke, the Police, the Carpenters, Cat Stevens). The music has to tell us where, what, and how it must be.”

When I was a younger musician, I used to ask the question, “What’s the right note?” as a kind of fun teaser. Although on the surface it was a naive and impossible inquiry, it got me asking about meaning, order, process, measure, and value. The question asked is a caring question, about the honor of being called, not simply ordering the call.

Today, because there is so much stuff out there and everybody and their mother is producing something of their own, and by themselves, this electronic access entitlement offers no accountability for misreading or misusing “the calling.” We are oversaturated to even be able “to hear” anything. I think the respectable balance lies between a deep look at how our past brought us here and a serious engagement with what’s here in our now, but the view forward is a take on what happened, best current practices, and proper reflection and gestation toward the new next-best-forward for the music and the folks. We need a new standard.

That's the charge and the ministry in arts today. We are vying for people's attention span, that's the reality. But we have to give something that holds their attention a little longer, and in that millisecond of longer you have to inject them with something that's going to make a difference in their experience, so they will stay, come back, see that your "thing, branding, uniqueness" is worth "the sell and the stay," and they are transformed into someone who did not purchase another thing but lives now being made over by something, your music that has "intrinsic worth and value" because of its "believed in and experienced worth."

So what's up, what's next, and how are we going to be a part?

Final Cadences and Coda

So as the blog piece asked, "What's killing our culture?" I would answer: "our lack of true cultural definition, and our inability to know how to 'dial up' on the cultural codes."

Artists begin making expressions with intrinsic value, given gifts, and earned skills, but now they are being asked to compromise that for a growing need of market stupidity that benefits empty capitalism, all for the sake of satisfying someone's broken attention span. The "big bucks pop farms" (*American Idol*, *Dance America*, *America's Got Talent*, *The Voice*, *Duets*) also encourage empty materialism and fast fancy fame that produces nothing substantive or lasting.

Again, people are open to being transformed into someone who did not purchase or watch or listen to just another any old thing, but lives are now being made over by something—music or other forms—that have "intrinsic worth and value" because of its "believed in and experienced worth." I believe the formula, especially for popular music, is the long-proven model of a good song, great singing, carried in great musician-based creative music that lives beyond the next market spin. We need to stand up, realize what time it is really, and partner with she who turns on the values on the cultural dial, but the principal hands on that dial must be the informed and creatively dynamic youth.

1. So, in short, dial up substantive, sustainable values that matter.
2. Dial up on real music and culture traditions, not mechanized and unoriginal artists and ideas.

WAKE UP! WHAT TIME IS IT REALLY?

3. Dial up on the visibility of critical thinking voices that see, speak, and send the culture forward, not downward.
4. Demand excellence at every level; stand up against trash and stupid stuff.
5. Encourage, love, love, love; support and challenge every young person we see and inspire them all to ask the deeper questions: What kind of human being am I going to be? What change, difference, and inspiration can I contribute to in all I do?

No young person should have to settle for stupidity and all should be boldly encouraged to turn up the cultural dials in all directions.

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DOES OUR MUSIC STILL BRING THE GOOD NEWS OF THE DAY?

May I ask: Is a generation possibly being lost to us? I don't want to be dismissive or old and cranky, but if you don't at least ask, you feel foolish or lost, tripping backwards in your own dream, sleepwalking. Today there are few islands, caves, states, or planets where we can totally escape much of this inevitable human maze and dead-ends we now find ourselves in. Politics, TV news, entertainment culture, education, economic roller-coasters, and our societal cultural climate is in chaos, gone unchecked. Truth is sometimes a disturbing idea. And so we wonder, is it better to have a wake-up call? "Money-chase" games have become the norm, and the well of civility, integrity, and community has gone dry. I sense, among far too many young people today, total distract- edness and being mixed up and in fogs of sustained adolescence—I mean, perpetually not growing up. Is there is a missing piece, a lost opportunity, to link us to that which we dropped? Mentorship is missing.

My concern is that we seem destined to fall for wherever the wind lands us and not aware that it takes some digging in and planting seeds for growth. But if nothing happens tomorrow, we all seem happy with the next storm that brews, and nobody remembers the reasons why the winds and the storm came. And this commentary is a sign of the larger American modern cultural damage and dysfunction. One of the great triumphs of modern society through technology is that injustice and abuses of the megaculture system we live in, and our own tripping, no longer sneak by properly cloaked in silence, and so we see and hear Rome burning and screaming all around us and this reality again is inescapable. It's not that I don't have hope and belief that this generation will win with brain-filled agency and smart, swift action and changes, but what I'm worried about is the timing of it all.

DOES OUR MUSIC STILL BRING THE GOOD NEWS OF THE DAY?

It's taking too long for consistent fruit, and the low-hanging fruit is badly wormed, the soil is crusty and dry, and the tillers of the harvest are all very tired. I'm not too heavy lidded to miss the advances in technology, or social-media, contemporary electronic connectivity and the world of fast solutions that have revolutionized our times and literally put the world at our fingertips. In terms of human/social/life culture patterns, though, the spin downward is visible and troubling. We are entitled by a new brutally selfish social birthright. It's a kind of "I have the right to do what I want to do whenever, and by the way, right now fast" entitlement.

It used to be the O'Jays would sing, "I Love Music," and the old men sang, "Give me that old-time religion," and Nina mused, "to be young, gifted and Black with our souls intact." It used to feel different. There used to be a feeling that people stood up and for things, and demanded what was good for our society. It feels like today people are more apathetic, nothing much matters but getting more stuff we want. It used to be your political party loyalty was a choice in perspectives, not a choice in who you wanted to take up arms against. It used to be that sexuality was a private, mature matter; now it's a selective optioned style you choose over and over and try it again on the fly. Just pick a button and try. Why not have so many options? All the songs say nothing. All the signs are turned upside-down. All the roads, well intentioned and lit, have fuses that go out all the time. All the young moms are, well, are they mothers? All the fathers are absent. The grandmothers want to be like their daughters who want to be like their daughters and the little girls are very confused right now. Boys are not focused on what it means to grow up and be men.

And all the people in power are lacking in too many ways to count. It used to be fads were waves of growing up into styles that sharpened individuality. We are wired up with no place to go, games and gadgets and no time to know, how to say excuse me, or pardon me, or I'm sorry, or what would it be like if I stopped to allow you? Music: loud, vacuous, disrespectful, and more ugly. I may be just too old-fashioned, but the music used to bring the good news of our journey forward too. This is the only musical movement period that makes me wonder: Have we given up on progressive forward motion on youth and social activism? So much of today's music, if it could be singled out, is "selling out and selling its soul" to commercial poison-ism, leaving represented communities in dismal, abysmal, cultural chaos. The music used to be the good sense,

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the fabric, the clock, the beat, and the bloodline. The single best example I see of a slip is young men in huge numbers as a style movement having their pants hanging, exposing their rear ends proudly, underwear askew, as they scuffle across the street attempting to hold their pants up. Young women used to dress with a sense of delicate decency; now being “hot” has supplanted being smart. I think our society as a whole is sleepwalking, already headed over the cliff, and what’s worst is the lack of courage that’s exhibited to recognize and speak out. And today we continue in this silence and help further darken for young people an already clouded path. The industry and the consumers who willingly support, produce, sell, and sit silent are all a part of a spiraling swift downfall of our larger culture in contemporary society, connected and fast-wired to a number of problematic practices escalating daily. Beyond the distractions of everything fast, furious, and famous for five minutes is the preoccupation and being pacified with gadgets, games, and buying things. For me as a musician, the saddest thing is that there are fewer great contemporary Black urban musical artists of note.

Too much of the music sounds the same in every city, on every mainstream radio station, and most of what we see projected as Black music is rude, loud, crude, and lewd. The value codes for our music have changed so much, the music matters less and only that it sells. Where is great music artistry? We pray loudly for a creative and forward aesthetic revolution of sustained substance led by today’s young artists. Industry heads who have controlled, made the deal and the steal, really have never known or cared about the directions for music, but we do. Creative industry has become a distracted dash to sample, copy and paste, retweet, download, and stash the cash. Instead of finding creative original human-grown solutions in our natural evolution, everybody is in a race to engage the “next new since last week” electronic entertainment info-box operating system. As an artist, you must resist. It’s all rarely focused on much else, a vicious cycle of bad human drama. Media is fascinated and fastened on disturbing stories and not lifting stories. Guns and blowing things up sells more tickets at the box office, so our cultural chaos is boxed up for us and fed to us as a cultural diet. And this is actually our cultural cancer today, and it grows. How can we expect a healthy society when the picture of it is shown as violent, ruthless, greedy, and human-less?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN
ON THE CRISIS IN THE
POPULAR ARTS AND SOCIETY
Steps Ahead

We are all looking for ways to move forward and live productive lives in problem times. And there are things that need to be said. Our social consciousness has been thwarted, though, and compromised because the courage to speak meaning to power has been swapped for political correctness. Today, one of the driving reasons for our escalating social insensitivity, incivility, is because we ingest so many problematic images, messages, and cultural practices in the media, music, and manufacturing processes focused on market demands, prescriptions to make money. This corrupts deeply.

As artists, we must resist.

We notice a frayed, disrupted central core value system that cannot sustain all the eruptions on the topsoil. My focus is much narrower these days, on ideas, on art that lifts, inspires, and highlights our human capacity to think, live, and make a better world. We think we need a new song to sing—the kind of song, or innovative art, where ideas move people and change the world. As Margaret Mead, American anthropologist, reminded us, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Today, young people have even sharper minds and faster tools, and there are better examples for them, if they are led to choose smartly. If the music and art do not address the problems, the problems don’t get sung about, and there will be fewer notes that ring out to reach out to and from the people, if the music dies.

But art can’t only be about a fuss and a fight; it must include forward movement. Let me take my old fart nostalgic “we had it better back in the day rose-colored utopia dream bliss” glasses off for a second and say, today

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in hip-hop, from Kurt Cobain to Bruno Mars and Adele, from today's artists, writers, poets, you can find the positive forward too.

We have to be good students of the culture we occupy, in order to realize and garner the lessons learned from that life observation. The details of our derailment that dangle in view are impossible to miss, but the benefits of our study are immediate. Not keeping up with the Joneses but keeping them in view from all sides of the track provides anybody with an understanding of the worlds we live in and a measure of the tangible as we wrestle with these tangles. These questions—What kind of world do we live in? What does the world (culture) value? And how does one fit, permit, and sit in that world?—are essential.

Every generation has its rights and destiny to assemble its warriors, battle strategies, and songs. But that is always a prescription for its sustained survival, not its end. What we've noticed is certain core values, an appreciation of communal connectivity, and artistic development have shifted, and the industry invests in and promotes a higher number of projects that focus more on empty commercialism and me-ism and mine, mine, more mine, and certainly less from the mind. We can see and hear a definite shift from these central core values of meaning. No one is saying the world has come to an end or that empty commercialism is a new problem. But we are certainly in a different mind-set now in terms of what is uni-human defined.

There are two recent books that bring light to this cultural mashup we find ourselves in. *I Got Schooled* by M. Night Shyamalan and *Generation on a Tightrope* by Arthur Levine and Diane R. Dean are both books that focus on a new educational model and our cultural systems, and they provide insights into these shifts and address what could be the worldview of this current generation. Both agree, today's generation is uniquely wired, all puns intended.

We need a radical reboot of our social-cultural-aesthetic platform-program, if it is to be inclusive, connected to today's generation, artists, audiences, and this society. We simply have to create another "through the wire hookup," because our traditional lines won't connect.

All studies show that the number one event or enterprise that was meaningful and significant in the lives of this generation is the establishment of the World Wide Web, and electronic connectivity and social media. Which means most of the cultural codes, values, and the means

by which we obtained success are of little significance to today's young people. Many of the things we like, wanted, or got excited about can be gotten to through completely other means or don't exist as primary avenues anymore.

The shift is major modulation. For example, you can sense this in conversations around the ethics involved in preparation or to aspire toward achievement. "Digital natives" may acquire things and ideas through a tribal social networking, sharing content and means to get at it. Here you notice a radical shift in the value of obtaining things and goals from a more traditional "old-school" orientation.

Original individual thought, critical thinking, has shifted to shared platforms, enhancing the speed to gather information and the ease of access. The ethics that says "you can achieve what you want because you have direct access" has replaced an ethics that is prepared for appreciating the long haul and aspiring hard work to make it in the world, and not it being made for you. These seem like very different rules. But how will the bridge be built that puts in play sustainable exchanges between the two worlds, and where are shared cultural codes possible? That is the challenge today, because the economic, generational, cultural gap has to be closed.

We can still participate and alter/affect the thinking and actions, in the world, in the communities we live in, together. We've seen over the years many examples of proactive creative work that has changed people's lives. But that art and song, that creative dreamscape that was beautiful, powerful, and compelling, contained meaning. It was well crafted. Today there is a change both in terms of the intentionality of things and the devastating reality and effect on young people.

All of us have seen our political landscape now poisoned by mistrust and venomous attacks, and we've seen media, movies, TV, and popular culture plummet in terms of content and values, with an escalation of irresponsible choices left for the public to scrape and sort through, and all for the love of money, greed, a need to get short-lived attention and pointless power. What's palpably apparent is the rise in this as common practice, and the rise in our adapting to it as acceptable and normative. I don't believe the real must become the reality.

It's clear we cannot live in a world and society that you can't talk about. You cannot talk about any change in that society without looking toward young people to be a part of that talk and change. But change

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means a real consideration of our realities and somehow talk, walk, and change need to come together.

So, what can we do ?

1. Dialogue and share, create a committed discussion among us about powerful and positive ideas, music and cultural happenings, places that people are continually pushing ahead.
2. Mentor and model. Make sure we engage all the young people we can, and take 10 minutes and talk, share with them a powerful positive idea. Give them, as a conscious culture-minded adult, another idea, a worldview, a view from “the good hood.”
3. Be courageous and committed to, as the *Essence* magazine campaign was a few years ago, “take the music/arts back,” and speak up, call your local media, TV, and have communities demand sensitivity not censorship. Push for a broader mainstream ingesting of positive and powerful cultural images, stories, music, and art.

We have to sing, step, talk, and walk on the positive powerful downbeats again, and together be accountable for changing our society.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

GEORGE LEWIS REVIEW

George Lewis, *Les Exercices Spirituels* (Tzadik Records, TZA 8081CD), 2011

Modern art music in the concert tradition often requires a different language to describe it, along with new ways to talk about listening and experiencing it. George Lewis, the Edwin H. Case Professor of Music at Columbia University and featured composer on this CD, challenges us to experience his music as an altogether unique sonic venture. The three works on this CD, dedicated to philosopher Arnold L. Davidson, represent evolved and evocative contemporary concert music, with considerable depth in sound, conception, and intellectual scope. Lewis is a master in American new music environments, and his work reflects the influence of Chicago's Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), an organization to which he has belonged for decades and a community of innovative thinkers that expresses ideas with an acute awareness of relevancy and timeliness. Like much great avant-garde music, Lewis's works draw largely on musical fragments, conceptual ideas and sounds, sequences, extended instrumental effects, and extended performative devices that are sometimes more clearly poetic than driven by predictable and traditional definitions.

The music's evocation, precision, color sound landscapes, spiritual sonorities, rhythmic pulsations, instrumental pairings with electronic streams, and diverse melodic directions of line aptly draw the listener in. Lewis is always interested in clarity of musical ideas, expansive development, and collaboration.

Lewis's work here calls for adventuresome listeners who are open to music that can be appreciated as an experience of philosophical ideas. To be sure, Lewis's music pulls from many traditions, including spirituals and

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American folk tunes. Yet, with its modern freshness, this music evokes unison lines through its razor-sharp precision, references to bebop, and electronic music samples and synth effects. We sense the presence of Charles Ives in its marching band spirit and sonorous church bells. The quality of this recording is superb, which allows Lewis's remarkable ideas and sounds to be heard with clarity. The ensembles represented here (Ensemble Erik Satie and Wet Ink) are superb and execute the music with extraordinary precision and provocative expressiveness.

The CD opens with the title selection *Les Exercices Spirituels*, scored for flute, bass clarinet, drums and percussion, guitar, violin, cello, and live electronics and spatialization, performed by Ensemble Erik Satie with Arnaud Petit conducting. Lewis writes of his work, "these spiritual exercises were for me . . . something to focus my compositional energy on, to interact spiritually with the more prosaic and determined compositional processes." Immediately we are grabbed by the precision of rhythmic pulsations, and the distillation of aural color. In the few collected pitches Lewis spins out, there is still plenty of space for the music to develop. And develop it does. The strings, percussion, woodwind, and synthesizer effects grow and are eventually joined by piano, guitar, and cymbals.

This effect is a musical construction of birdcalls in a "nature walk environment." As this sonic environment continues to evolve, we might liken it to an abstract painting, where colors can actually be "heard." When viewed from every possible angle, the colors in this aural landscape begin to mix and converge.

Hello Mary Lou is a markedly different work in that it evokes a quiet elegance. The piece was inspired by the 1990 documentary *Music on My Mind*, directed by Joanne Burke. Written for flute, clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, trombone, tuba, viola, cello, and double bass, *Hello Mary Lou* was recorded by the ensemble Wet Ink, conducted by Carl Christian Betterdorf. Lewis chose to orchestrate this work in long-winded gestures that color the track appropriately and patiently. This is simply a lovely jazz ballad in new musical colors. Eventually, snippets of blues and bebop emerge, only to return to the familiar ballad style that opened the piece. The final work on this CD, *Ikons*, was written for the Vancouver Olympiad. It is another large-scale, collaborative piece, scored for flute, clarinet, bassoon, percussion, violin, cello, and double bass, all conducted by composer Rand Steiger. Lewis's "trombone voice, as a composer," can be heard in the

funky middle section of this work. Near the end we hear a varied texture comprised of bebop, reminiscences of Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du soldat*, and the welcome return of exquisite trombone playing. This is a totally satisfying and exciting CD with an avant-garde sensibility and a commitment to a style of music that appeals to listeners who look for line, phrase, nuance, and innovative musical expression.

This is new American music from the pen of a modern master who knows his blues, spirituals, bebop, and song traditions, and how to challenge us into hearing these traditions even more deeply.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

DON'T USE THE "J-WORD"

Jazz and Its Connections to Culture and Meaning

This chapter consists of discussions with Dr. Billy Taylor, Gerri Allen, Lenny White, Stanley Clarke, Esperanza Spalding, Wynton Marsalis, Lee Ritenour, Patrice Rushen, Don Byron, Billy Childs, Michael Powell, David Baker, George Duke, Nnenna Freelon, Chuck Wilson, Christian Scott, Anthony Kelley, Morris Hayes, Kendrick Oliver, and Maria Schneider.

If you wanted to use a term representing a forward music culture that is relevant, contemporary, and connected to the people, please don't use the "J-word." I raise this idea within the important cultural debates about our music, our artists, and the cultural contexts they work within. I suspected I would get good information and sharing from this great group of artists. We are all living similar tales in culture, drinking from the same rich well, and yet simultaneously watching the stream being potentially poisoned with corporate dictates that always affect artists. So what began to flow back, no matter who was speaking, were the "natural" inclinations when artists talk, and that edgy expression that comes with the territory of jazz artistry anyway. The exchanges were like a community, a family, cousins who are reunited at the family reunion feasting and watching the barbeque burn on the fire, and thinking, "Should we pour more sauce on it, save it, savor the flavor of the moments, or sanctify the memories?" A discussion about the identity, place, and meanings around jazz (the J-word) today looms large, because we care about this music, frankly.

There is, across the board, a real suspicion of market-forced, corporate-dictated "stuff," the need for an American jazz re-education among the masses, concern about the dislodging of jazz from Black identity, and the need for musicians to rise up and take back the music. What does it mean

to use a word as a movement in art and realize that word has no real connection and application to the culture it's applied within? In recent discussions with contemporary artists, critics, and educators, there is lots to share on these issues. I interviewed, hung, and jammed with friends from both coasts. For example, making a very interesting point to consider, bassist Esperanza Spalding noted that unlike the members of "my group"—who have anxieties and questions about the "place of jazz" in the market—her generation is "in a better position to not be burdened with that question of what it is or will become, because being in such a period of cross-pollination, I don't know what it [jazz, the J-word] is now . . . and that may be a good thing." Musicians regularly talk about the meaning and practices of music. This is ultimately what establishes it, guards against corporate control, and provides interpretation, growth, and safeguards against erasure.

Right off the RTF (Return to Forever) international tour, drummer Lenny White said, "All over the world and here in the States, a key phrase from the tour that was consistent from people was, 'Thank you for doing this again.' That's the difference, we are filling a void."

Billy Taylor lamented with me in his Riverdale apartment that the thing he notices the most is "the lack of comradery and community among the players . . . that's either gone or being blocked. Mary Lou Williams would invite both Monk and Budd Powell over to her place and say, 'You guys have to play piano with more finesse.' They would do this, share with each other." So here are as a start, reflections from three different generations, each born thirty years apart from each other, all doing jazz in our culture, and all feeling the relevance of at least the questions addressing what this music is meaning in the world we live in today. This jumping off into the exchanges framed our many subsequent talks during the summer of 2008.

Jazz as the American, Under-the-Radar, Invisible Art Form?

For artists, aesthetic, philosophical discussions usually outweigh market speculation, record bin labels, and audience tastes. But in a real economy where market forces dictate culture, the hearing and placement of recorded or downloaded music, "new artists" signs, festivals to the now fewer live venues for performing, one does need to consider: What does jazz mean today and how and where does it "count and cost" and matter?

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Has it become again under the radar and an invisible art form? Given a competitive market for commercial/art dollar, how will it maintain its distinctive voice and character so once needed to define what it was, or how the culture saw and used it? And who gets to decide what face jazz puts on a corporate executive or contemporary artists who want their voices to define the substance of the culture of the music?

The reality is, you can't really talk about the J-word in the abstract, but you must deal with it in real form motion in connection to "culture," TV/media, fashion, education, radio, movies, and other forms of popular culture. Jazz is definitely not dead, but where are the spaces, really, that it lives and connects, and how are artists truly making those public connections?

Jazz music, the J-word, may be like Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* in the music world today as he put it, "You [the J-word] ache with a need to convince yourself that you do exist within the real world, that you're a part of all the sound and anguish, and you strike out with your fists, you curse and swear to make them recognize you. And alas, it's seldom successful."

For the first time in many years, jazz music is not only absent from the common person's perspective on American streets, it is an "invisible identity" because we rarely see or reference what the J-word is in mainstream popular culture. As a matter of fact, most people don't relate to the J-word musically in our culture. Nothing new really. While working in residence from Duke University in New York, composer Anthony Kelley responded, "It's been co-opted. It's a dangerous word. Because now it has the same implications (real or imagined) of the 'C-word'—classical music. It carries the same shame of cultural poisoned identity classical music has, 'esoteric and irrelevant.'" These are harsh words from a 21st-century Black American composer who uses jazz to inform his classical symphonic works.

But the problem here is at the larger cultural level: The meaning of music usage overall in the public market has been switched out and replaced by a huge macro-media-entertainment monster (DVD, games, TV reality, . . .) that is eating our young people instead of feeding them. Jazz will find it harder and harder to survive, unless it makes itself responsive to this culture crisis. Because if we don't prepare our youth across the culture, there will be fewer and fewer places for jazz to be acceptable as a contemporary music form—it will be of little use to a culture that doesn't know what it is. I think some of the blame Anthony Kelley speaks of has to do with the way in which art demands self-consciousness more than not.

It may be that we turn a deaf ear on society's problems because we find so much of our time focused on "our work." Young people are not using jazz in large enough numbers to tell their creative stories in tones anymore, and that's reflected in the general culture and it shows up in sales. Our work may need to lean toward a bit more of an educating focus, filling a void left in public schools and popular culture.

Culture: The Jazz Band in Culture

After seeing Lenny White, Chick Corea, Stanley Clarke, and Al Dimeola recently playing as a source fusion band, it is clear they truly helped to create the models for this new approach to jazz. Five major bands emerged from the Miles Davis experiments of the 1960s: Return to Forever, Mahavishnu Orchestra, Headhunters, Weather Report, and Tony Williams's Lifetime. Tony Williams and Joe Zawinul have passed on and true to Lenny White's comment, RTF is the only remaining seminal band from this movement, and this was only a reunion not a refusion of the band or a return. Gonzalo Rubalcaba's new Cuban quartet, Hiromi's Socibloom, presents refreshing fusion ensemble-music twists in the missing piece of this jazz band puzzle. Missing in action is Bob James and Lee Ritenour's Fourplay, which along with Pat Metheny represented a new wave of the progressive jazz band formula countering the more commercial formulaic smooth jazz configurations of late that followed. Although there is the Yellow Jackets and Mike Stern's recent collaboration, Béla Fleck is currently holding up tradition, Soul-live represents a new hipped-hopped twist, if in the search for the Ellington/Basie traditions. Even if we have to stretch to look over the record-bin fence to neighbors like the remaining Rolling Stones, Mint Condition, or the Roots, one has to wonder if the long-lasting touring bands in jazz and popular music culture will ever again be a defining entity of jazz performing culture.

Discussions

Lenny White

Bill: You just finished a tour where you have come back with a band from the seventies with a repertoire of recorded works and the same

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guys you played with 25 years ago. What's the difference in the musical culture between then and now?

Lenny: Before, what we did was a movement, a part of something with a whole lot of different artists. Now there are not that many. We were "sources," we were "originators of a new thing." Nowadays it's all about copying the source. All over the world and here in the States, a key phrase from the tour that was consistent from people was "Thank you for doing this again." That's the difference, we are filling a void.

Maria Schneider and Kendrick Oliver

I also spoke to two reigning contemporary J-word artists in this area (jazz-big-band-orchestra), Maria Schneider and Kendrick Oliver.

Bill: Tell me what it means to be a jazz big-band leader today? What do you walk through to "get there" and how are today's audiences responding? Do you feel OK with the cultural marketplace as it relates to your art, or if you could, would it have been better to musically exist in another musical time? What are the advantages, disadvantages today?

Maria: I would say, I'm happy to be making [jazz band/orchestra] music now because that is all I know. I once spoke to a Basie musician about this and he noted that at the time they were working constantly, he wasn't aware that he was living "an era." He said they were just busy making music. What's most important now is to take what we have around us, the whole landscape, the world, present-day questions, and search for new answers, expressing who we are, now. And this is an interesting time musically, because we don't have one kind of music or cultural movement that everyone rides on. The world has become so eclectic and so diverse. The new reality is global, and it could be daunting and confusing to find your place within it, but I find it exciting, because through music in this present time, one can also experience a sort of citizenry of the world.

Differences in American, European audiences? I can't know or judge how anyone would perceive my music, but generally the outer reaction in varying places, Brazil, all over Europe, and the U.S., is one of openness. My music has elements from many kinds of music and I think most people listen in relation to what they themselves know. So maybe they are responding because they see it as having a piece of their world in it. I think that's partly how my music connects. But my personal hope would

be that people most connect to my musical world by feeling humanity in the music. I know that's what I want to experience when I listen. That's where the power of music is. My feeling is that jazz—classical music, too—went through a phase where everyone was trying to press the music further and further in terms of harmony, rhythm, complexity, but in many cases, to my ears, it often loses its humanity amidst that.

I sense that many musicians are trying to get back to the place where music, even if highly detailed, complex and intricately constructed, still communicates with people.

Bill: How are you managing your identity as a jazz band artist?

Kendrick: I personally feel very comfortable, and I considerate it an honor. Wherever I see Roy Hargrove, he calls me “the maestro.” To have musicians recognize you as such. I think the jazz band is a profound tool of entertainment, because it has the size of the symphony orchestra and the hipness that can reach a larger audience. The problem is not with the consumer or having an audience connect to this. If you get kids to go see a show of a jazz orchestra, if you are grooving hard, and if it's done right, the kids have a blast.

I went to a clinic with the Lincoln Jazz Orchestra with Wynton. All these kids were there, and Wynton had them swinging. And these were kids with no musical background! The p [problem] comes in when they hear the words “jazz orchestra” or “jazz orchestra with conductor.” The problems really, though, come with the promoters. It's the jazz promoters who drive the market or if it's going to be too expensive. You hear, “How big is the group? . . . No, no” before you can even quote them a price. But if you put together a swinging program, it will be successful. It does get frustrating financially sometimes, so you have to find alternative ways to do the financing. It's a part of having a large group. The big band, though, is a terrific art form, and people always ask, “How do you do this?” It's only difficult in your mind. If I said, “I'm not going to be able to do this,” then of course I wouldn't be around.

I love doing this; this is something that's in me. This is something I look forward to doing when I wake up, and I'm generally thinking about it when I go to bed. It's a beautiful art form and while it's not as popular as Beyoncé or hip-hop, everything has its place. I honestly believe we are in line for a huge revival. I watch the subtle things. We live in a star-driven society. It's funny how if one person does something, everybody else jumps on the bandwagon. Natalie Cole's record, before you knew it, everyone is trying to do it. Rod Stewart was trying to do it, and then Queen Latifah

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was doing a record with a big band. Imagine how many people would do this if a Beyoncé wanted to get involved. It's a profound art form. It takes a lot of skill to play in a big band. And it takes a special musician to do this. Not only do you have to be selfless, you have to also be talented at the same time. I think at some point players are going to be rewarded for that kind of sacrifice, of being a part of such a significant art form.

Bill: Does this, sacrifice, working hard, translate to something that this generation wants and values?

Kendrick: Yes, if they are given a chance. I had a terrific high school in Houston, Texas, the high school of performing and visual arts. We all had different ideas of what we were going to do. I had no idea that I was going to lead a jazz orchestra. My high school director said, "Pay attention to everything you do in the industry because you never know when you are going to need all these tools." I respected how the big bands were run. I thought it was amazing how all these people had to work together to get this one sound. If you look at it, these are the same things coaches are asking football players to do: all individuals working to get to the same goal. Financially the reward hasn't been there for the musicians like it is for athletes.

But if you get a young person who is a talented musician, and it's a rewarding experience and I think it's very sellable. We short-sell our young people. I do clinics where there are great music programs, and where they don't have great music programs, and we get an awesome, awesome response.

Bill: You don't do just pop arrangement, right?

Kendrick: We have a program called "In the Pocket." We take all these different styles—swing, New Orleans, gospel, funk—and put them together. We did this at a small college in Rhode Island and I invited up Kirk Whalum and it was bananas, the response!! People who have never heard jazz before, if they hear the groove, it connects. The groove element is always the key. It was the type of show that everybody could appreciate.

Culture, Innovative Voices, and Corporate Dictates

Innovation among instrumentalists was always an identity that marked the J-word movements. While numerous young new artist signs flood the tra-

ditional and smooth jazz markets on radio, are there any real new, innovative, distinctive, original voices who changed the approach or the sound of their instrument? Visionary means a cultural game change, like a Hendrix approaching distortion and revolutionizing sound, or Bill Evans's complete new way of harmonizing, or a Miles Davis inspiring a generation to go a new direction. There is nothing "new or visionary" today. In a conversation with bassist/composer Stanley Clarke, he added, "It takes certain ingredients for people to understand what we do."

There have always been players, musicians out there on the fringe, who were not popular. Jazz is virtuoso music. We are on the fringe edge, man, we are the "fringe benefit." Perhaps with the exception of bassist Jaco Pastorius, or the innovative approach to guitar of Stanley Jordan, jazz has produced not a single instrumental voice of this kind of retwist or remaking of an instrumental approach. Although Kurt Rosenwinkel, Stefon Harris, Esperanza Spalding, Christian Scott, and Miguel Zenón have dynamic presence and voice, no single trumpet player, saxophonist, pianist, or drummer of major distinctive "instrumental voice-changing significance" has really been projected. Donald Harrison, Christian McBride, Terrance Blanchard, Roy Hargrove, and the Marsalis are all the "traditional icons" now and can't really excite the marketplace as young or new. In the vocal jazz tradition, Al Jarreau, Bobby McFerrin, Take 6, Cassandra Wilson, Dianne Reeves, and even Norah Jones stick out. It would be very smart for jazz to claim Erykah Badu and Jill Scott, who are original voices with heavy roots in jazz.

Billy Childs

Bill: What has happened in your estimation in the marketplace as you have watched things change?

Billy: Audiences have been separated from jazz, and there are a number of reasons for that having to do with corporate shifts. Jazz is a music that requires what I call "active listening." Listening that engages your mind, you have to imagine things and have your brain working while you're listening. In the eighties, a lot of things were created that are the antithesis of active listening. One thing, MTV came on the scene and now it became necessary to have a visual image while you listen to the music. Nothing was left to the imagination. Your mind doesn't have to

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think about anything, it was told what to think about while the music was playing, that and technology encroaching upon us.

Bill: Given that you've watched your music as a jazz artist grow from the late eighties, through the nineties, now twenty years later, what does it feel like? Is this an identity that even has sense anymore?

Billy: Jazz is part of my vocabulary. It's what I do. I also do classical, and all kinds of music. I have had in my whole career, been doing music that I've never been ashamed for. I have relative respect in my field from my peers. I have always been unto myself, and I am going to do what I do, and however popular that is or not, is beside the point.

Bill: That is what any jazz artist says—they don't care about being famous. But you are rare in that you won a Grammy award for jazz! What does it mean for a jazz composer to win the Grammy for best jazz composition?

Billy: The Grammy is a great thing to put on a résumé, and it was a great honor when I got it, but it hasn't helped my jazz career a lot. Yes and no, I guess. Because I got nominated so many times in one year at the same time, NPR then got interested in me—for the first time—and they did an interview on me. Then I got a lot of record sales and recognition. NPR! I had no idea how powerful they are. The Grammy win had a great impact on that. It was another thing that helped me produce my music by myself without any involvement from record labels.

Bill: Working with Chris Botti, the lead-selling contemporary jazz artist today, comes with pluses, but what are the challenges? How do you navigate this “jazz identity” within a more “commercial jazz label prescription?”

Billy: Well, it's “jazz pop.” With the Chris Botti gig, and I must say, it's a very music-fulfilling gig. I love that gig because the band is so great—Billy Kilson, Bob Hurst, James Genus, Tim LeFebvre, Mark Whitfield, and Chris on trumpet. But for my own “jazz thing,” the bottom line is, this is a means to an end because it's a way to gather income so that I can do my own jazz chamber music. He works a lot, and I have gotten identified now with “his sound.” This is not a bad thing because it's not a “bad sound”; it's a “good sound.” I don't really care if it's a pop sound, the bottom line is when I do my music, it will be “real” because it's mine, it's what I want to do, and I have the capital to do it and I'll

be able to do it now on my own terms without any interaction from any corporate interests.

Nnenna Freelon

I asked Nnenna Freelon to give me her read, her definition, of jazz culture: What's real, and what in her mind defines "voice"?

Nnenna: Jazz culture for me represents how I was brought up in this culture. I was taught by older musicians. I came up in the [Black] church, where there is a family, a community, a lifestyle, and there is a sensibility, right things to do. Things that are wrong, invisible rules, and things you observe, a decorum. You don't run up over somebody's solo. When someone asks you to sing in church, you might expect payment, but your answer is always "Yes"—you stepped up to the plate. All these things existed in a larger community.

It was not a thing where the music is over here and culture was over here. These emerge from the culture; it shaped, fed the culture and reflected back to us who we were through the performance of it. We learned "Lift Every Voice and Sing," Paul Lawrence Dunbar. And you might think Paul Lawrence Dunbar had nothing to do with jazz. But we had to learn all this as a part of the cultural puzzle from Langston Hughes to Miss Smith's cornbread. It's all a part of the understanding of this music.

When I came of age as a young singer, the older musicians told me who to listen to, challenged my notion of what music was all about, and this really helped and encouraged me to get better.

Ellis Marsalis, Milt Hinton, Dr. Billy Taylor, these are people who took me under their wings. Ellis said, "You sound pretty good." That was it.

"Now, you need to listen to Little Jimmy Scott, Lorenz Alexander, Dinah." He led me down the path. He could tell from my voice what I did and did not know. He didn't praise me, as praise can stop you just as quickly as criticism does.

Everything you hear in culture should be a product of all you are. I can hear the people who are hearing truth. The "passers" are obvious. But if it represents falsity it is because it's not approached in truth. The human voice speaks and sounds like life experiences. It took me years of listening before I understand that and could hear my "voice experience."

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Dinah's voice cuts you like a sharp knife. Or a voice like Shirley Horn's that wraps itself around you.

Andy Bey, a voice full of earth and dark blue, purple, a night voice. Like the griot's voices, God gave him that voice and he learned to use it.

Billie Holiday, she invented herself. She was an articulate singer with a life experience edge.

Freelon's idea of "life experience" is what seems to be missing today. I can hear my mother's voice in the speaking of a saxophone, and the prayer rants of Deacon Jones there too. This cultural connectivity is what many miss in the commodification of this art form and what we claim and fight as the root of the problems.

Despite all the recent "hoop-ta-la" over today's "new generation of new jazz visionary players/singers," beyond the "George Butler Columbia youth upsurge movement" in the '80s with Wynton Marsalis and crew, or Steve Coleman's M-Base configurations, jazz as a movement among young players has been silent on these points as an independent contemporary musical movement. We are sure that the gene pool did not dry up—but is it within the "industry thinking" that no longer values such idea as innovation, distinction enough to seek, find, record and finance such "new original voices" in jazz? Given the fact that "original" voice has now been co-opted to mean "how many of the 'same voices' can we put out there," what could a "new configuration" of voices look like and sound like? I wondered and questioned if this were due to the public not being able to take this innovation, or if the industry was involved in dictating audience tastes, and how jazz artists respond to this corporate shift. Maybe we can find another word to describe the innovative artistry that symbolizes daring originality—and perhaps the J-word is not the term we use any longer for this. A peculiar predicament for this art form.

I asked trumpeter and band leader Christian Scott, if he could trace the linkage from everyone he listened to and shaped him, what would that list look like? And, secondly, what is Christian Scott bringing to the table?

Christian Scott

Scott: I would start with Buddy Bolden. When I was a little boy, my grandfather would sit me on his lap when I was two or three years old

and sing a song about Buddy Bolden. So I knew about Buddy Bolden before I knew about the trumpet. Of course, next would be Louis Armstrong. Then, Roy, Dizz, and Clifford Brown. I'd probably get a little "fat girl" in there (Fats Navarro), then Lee Morgan, Kenny Dorham, Freddie Hubbard, Woody Shaw. Then I stopped, because I was told not to listen to guys who are alive, if you're a man when they are men, you may not work. So, it stops around Woody Shaw.

I don't like to read the press. But someone said that there was a quote where the writer said I was one of the "architects of the new sound in jazz." But, I'm just a cat. I'm just trying to get my point across in the music. People are definitely starting to hear things stirring. What my group is trying to bring to the table, to contribute, is, we're not the type of band that edits ourselves. If I hear something that ties into, I'm not going to discard it because someone else might consider that as less valid than jazz. I'm not an exclusive person. When you start to put labels on things—like, for instance, Max Roach called himself a creative sound architect—these ideas are starting to translate to our generation, which is why you have guys like an Aaron Parks, or Robert Glasper, who take these chances and have these different palates. It's not that the palates are so different from what's going on, it's just they are listening to what's out there and not editing out of their music because other people condemn it.

Right now, for this music to survive, just the same as it's always been, you have to assimilate every texture and palate that comes your way. Because this is about being the best you can be, not about being only as good as the times dictate. You need to learn everything, listen to everything, and be prepared for everything—because if you don't, this music will not survive because it's been deemed to be something that is not commercially viable. I love my band because they are fearless. When we get on the bandstand, I have no idea what's going to be coming at me and I love it. It could be coming from Satie to Nine Inch Nails, or something from a 50 cent record, and processing all of it. And if we want to get into the game, we have to be the best like that. We can't have another generation where people have accepted the kind of insincerity that is requisite in a musical survival in the context of jazz. We can't have any of this, that is done. I was talking to slam poet Saul Williams, and he was actually talking about how hip-hop has become Republican. Cut-throat capitalism: "Forget you, I got mine" and "I'm not worried about you getting yours." And I look at jazz and it's very similar. We have to let go of this notion that we do whatever it takes

to “get on.” That’s not how it works. You make the music that is most compelling to you, you have convictions about what it is you are going to do, and whatever happens, happens. We’ve gotten a lot of flack about how our music sounds. But if you listen, it’s just the blues. It’s the blues, that’s it. The blues modernly nonedited.

Jazz and Education and Mentorship

A reality check on this: In 1975 as a 14-year-old eighth-grader and aspiring guitarist, I attended a regular public school in everyday urban America Detroit. We had music programs then. My musical heroes were George Benson, Al Dimeola, Stanley Clarke, George Duke, Lee Ritenour, Earl Klugh, and Patrice Rushen. I still have those records albums today. The sad thing—ask any kid who attends public schools in American cities who they are listening to. My other friends coming along who also attended these same urban middle and high schools? Gerri Allen, Gregg Phillangaines, Dwight Andrews, Regina Carter, Carla Cook, Kenny Garrett, James Carter, Mark Ledford (deceased, 2005). What are our schools teaching and what new future jazz artists are they producing? Of course they are out there, but . . . in what concentrations and numbers? Teaching at one of the leading jazz institutions in the world, our students are understandably unlike the students who came 25 years ago exclusively and passionately to study jazz and the jazz icons. Today, you have to wonder if many could even name a Duke Ellington standard or be interested in whistling a Charlie Parker head. Miles Davis for many students may be some old jazz dude who has a gravelly voice. We wonder, for many younger players today, if the J-word conjures up excitement about the dream of innovative playing as once practiced. Jazz, we may have to accept, is not the only model marketplace to find the next great innovative voices, and there’s nothing new or strange about that from examples of Jimi Hendrix to Macy Gray or Raul Midón.

The Berklee College of Music example here mirrors not a J-word cultural and musical ignorance as much as what is at play in wider interests these days, cross-style pollinations, the influence of global culture, more fluid use of technology, and a greater approach to diversity in the mainstream markets; perhaps purists are not allowed. The difference is

the cultural climate and context that we, as musicians, must change. The problem with the media-industry projection of jazz culture is they do much to sell the culture with ads but not as much to cultivate the culture of the music. Musicians always care more about the health of the art, not the industry. That point was raised here with Gerri Allen, as I asked: How did music matter in Detroit growing up? How did it shape her? And do these differences matter with current jazz meanings?

Gerri Allen

Gerri: Well today, especially in light of the loss of IAJE [International Association for Jazz Education], this is key right now; music should be at the center, the creative mechanics have to be at the helm of where we are going. Dr. Taylor mentioned that while the organization might be gone, the people are still there. My take on that is there should be a touring mechanism that would support the bands and musicians. That's what makes the music self-perpetuate itself. Because people would be seeing it all the time. Like Ravi Coltrane, for example, after repeated tours, we are looking at the choices in personnel he has made. People would be watching this, seeing who he might choose as a pianist, drummer, the new faces, etc. In all respect to IAJE, the musicians felt their place was on the back burner. The performative aspect of this is about the players and the musician process, which has to be at the forefront. Perhaps we could rally with local businesses to support this touring idea as well.

All the things we musicians don't have, we have to create access to these services. We should go after these things to allow musicians to be a part of this. They [businesses] could take on these bands as patrons, so that musicians have the benefits of health care and these kinds of things that we must be thinking about now. This is just my take on how or what we should be talking about more. It's as well an apprenticeship, mentorship kind of thing. The musicians passed this on. They were able to do this through touring and attach themselves to these mentors. The musician needs to be the focal point as a true representative of the music. This is the way we all learned. Kenny Garrett and myself learned this way. I met Marcus Bellgrave and Donald Byrd, who did a residence at our high school in Cass Tech [Detroit], and because they understood the mentorship aspect of this, that's how we got this.

Cultural Contexts: Meaning Now?

It would be culturally irresponsible to be asking what jazz represents or means, and where it lives, and deny a critical discussion about social, racial, and cultural politics in America. Jazz is a music that was uniquely formed to voice very specific actions and needs, and that is why the music sounds and means and communicates the way it does at its core. Further, politics and policies actually shape some of the market meaning, value, message, symbolization, and imagery of this music culture. In late August, I attended a Harvard Du Bois Institute forum/town talk “Does Race Still Matter?” And while these Baby Boomer concerns press hard upon the identity of the several hundred gathered, this current generation looks oddly at our ruffled brows.

But their entry is still dictated and navigated by White executives who are less likely to be concerned or caring about Black identity, or cultural climate and connections. But with jazz, I think you have to care about the history of the music and the costs of carrying on with this legacy as the way artists are projected, how many get proper advertising dollars, promo-dollar spin, and time and air time and page time, and artist signs matters.

Further, when does jazz represent in its current configuration, or connect within the contemporary contexts of Black people, its founders, or “originators and sources,” to use a Lenny White reference? Rarely do we say and deal with the big white elephant question in the room: Why is jazz not associated more directly with Black people today?

Are we not concerned that young Black people whose grandparents and great-grandparents were accused of “dirtying” White American teens with jazz and bebop in the 1920s, ’30s, ’40s, ’50s, that today these same teens would discard jazz icons, and neither claim nor recognize these artists? Bebop was the music of the young Black progressive musicians who championed a free innovative expression that ensured today’s youth could have the right to play what they wanted and to say what they wanted to be, sit at a lunch counter, and be counted as free in America. Nina Simone and Charles Mingus and John Coltrane certainly represented these connections. With all due respect to the argument for “European jazz” artistry—which, to this writer’s definition, does not represent the same historical distinctive approach or context to the origins of this history—there is no jazz that today is connected to dance or

fashion or a people's cultural identity and story. And that may be OK, just don't call it the J-word anymore.

In terms of the issues of art and racial identity, politics, and what to teach, Wynton had this to say.

Wynton Marsalis

Wynton: Don't call it Black music. Many people have a perspective on this. I had a teacher who did and he called it "White music." And that would make me cringe because that would mean I couldn't play it. I grew up endorsing it (a cultural-ist labeling), but now I don't. So I would teach it as American music. The greatest people who created it were a great people. It was Black people. So why isn't it that that's the achievement of America? I ask all of my students three basic questions:

1. What is the difference between improvisation and jazz improvisation?
2. Where do your melodies come from?
3. How do you construct your style, what are the components of your style?

Apply these questions to any of the things you and I are talking about, and you'll get your answer.

Now my students do just fine with the first question, but they don't do well with the second or third question, because they don't know how too. They don't know what the cultural questions are, and they certainly don't have enough things going on to define what their style is, or what it's made up of. Your melodic information is your musical identity. It comes from folk people, folk materials. Charlie Parker is the only person who could make a fast line, a melody line. We are all from that line of playing, and none of us can do that. Bach couldn't do it, and his stuff wasn't all that fast. Today we play runs, but he [Parker] was the only one who could take fast lines and make them a melody.

If you must, call it blues, African American music in the African diaspora—and you get to the root. Ask the questions what and who has the music produced, then you answer all the questions. We can't duplicate what that people did. There is no other music that is American but this music. White folks cannot be removed from jazz either.

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Teach the music right, and you don't have to worry about it. Racism is still abundant in jazz, but I haven't seen evidence that we need to worry about White people being scared of the music and where it is from. They are usually the ones who invest in it. Black people don't.

If you look into the future of this music, it will not be these nationalities warring about this or that. It's American music. The pressure and meaning of what America means, Negro musicians actually playing this music pressed and defined these issues much more than we are dealing with these questions now. So there it is.

Don Byron adds still another layer to the questions about, this J-word, and Black and other identities in the musical world we live in.

Don Byron

Don: I have always skirted around jazz, because for me it set up certain business limitations. If I wanted to play rock, I could play with rock musicians but could never be one. Rock musicians feel intimidated by jazz musicians and, of course, if you're Black you must play jazz. When classical musicians meet me and find out I play an orchestral instrument, they jump to jazz, disqualifying me from what they do. For me, the J-word is often used to tell me what I know, how I know it, and which music I'm supposed to play professionally. If I write a concert piece and the harmony is thick, a classical reviewer talks about jazz. The music may actually be coming out of Stravinsky or Satie, but it is reduced to "jazz." And although these things seem trivial, it affects product placement, grants, and marketing. If you make a classical record, will the audience for that music ever find out about it?

During the Mickey Katz period, the jazz press insisted that my playing that music was jazz and somehow it was troubling to them, while it was really klezmer music played by someone who'd worked legitimately in the idiom. The folks already in klezmer music insisted that what I was doing wasn't real, despite its actual authenticity. In the assertion that the music was jazz, I was often disqualified from world music venues, or even getting product placement in stores with other klezmer music. Even now on Amazon, the Mickey Katz recording, one of the most influential recordings in that music, is never klezmer music, always jazz. No one wants to admit that Black and White jazz

musicians have different paths, and the competent White jazz musician is doing a range of things—commercial, ethnic, Broadway—while Black jazz musicians depend on a single economy. The jazz skills are how lots of music gets done. People who know jazz do film scores, Black singers in Las Vegas, fill out the ethnic, Latin bands, and play pop. Somehow jazz—the institution—does not admit that.

Unfortunately the major reality affecting the work life of Black musicians is racism, not jazz. Ultimately, White musicians are accustomed to a kind of trade deficit: they work in Black music; Black musicians don't play—in significant numbers—in the “White music's” rock, country, classical, Latin, polka, etc. I really hated all the '80s and '90s negativity about fusion. I never understood it, and it was a negative criticism disproportionately applied to Black musicians.

In this case, jazz—the institution—kept Black jazz musicians from making music that appeals to Black people, particularly younger Black people, yet a few years later the jam bands do exactly this for a pointedly White audience and everything is hunky-dory. Jam bands are never critiqued in that way the jazz moniker does refer to concrete skills that other musicians are not required to have. I think most American musicians should understand jazz, and I am always shocked when the same ignorance that both of us experienced in school resurfaces so many years later. I believe in having those skills, but the music is not a fixed status quo music. Jazz is one of several important manifestations of what African American musicianship looks like. Gospel is another, the AACM [Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians] and BAG [Black Artists' Group] yet another. The world needs all of these sounds, supports these sounds.

The J-Word Living Outside of the Context of Jazz: Pop Culture?

There was a time in the '60s, '70s, '80s, where most musicians cut their teeth on jazz, and even in R&B recording sessions (Motown's Funk Brothers, Stax's Booker T. and the MG's). Many of these musicians were still essentially jazz cats doing the sessions. This cross-pollination is evident for us to see as Marcus Miller produced Miles Davis and Luther Vandross. But I wonder: What is the common music language dynamic among this generation's mainstream pop session players?

Charles Wilson and Morris Hayes

I was interested in how great musicians were adapting in the straight-up pop field and if they looked lovingly over at “J-word-land.” I asked Chuck Wilson—who plays with Justin Timberlake, writes for Timberland, and is currently on tour with Rihanna—and Morris Hayes, 20-year long-standing keyboardist, programmer, and band mate with Prince, also currently recording and on tour, and who is a consummate bebop pianist, by the way: How do they see the intersection of musicianship and marketplace? How do audiences respond today to this question of musicality and industry prescriptions? Their comments were consistent:

Chuck: We are the beat generation. We are concerned with the feel that keeps you moving. We don’t build from the harmonies and the melodies; we build from the beats up and float the melodies and harmony second, because that’s what the people are tapped into. But I study all that music, I know that music, and I flip it. I give you all that tradition, but use it to bring them in a new way.

Morris: You have to consider the bottom line at the end of the day: What do the people want? I don’t mind the word *commercial*. It’s commercial, it’s commerce, you are selling something, in that, music has to sell. But Prince has figured out how to meet the people, that bottom line, and the corporate midway, and he does it his way musically, and it’s [his music] always going to fill a stadium, and I have watched him do this all over the world from London to LA to Japan. He figured it out.

Duke is a master performer, composer, prouder, and is an icon in the jazz field, respected as someone who sits squarely in the middle touching all traditions from rock to swing. Having worked with Cannonball Adderly to Miles [Davis], Frank Zappa, and Dianne Reeves, George Duke in a recent public interview affirmed, “Many of my fans asked me to do another funk project (Duke Treat/Heads Up). There are not a lot of new R&B records in the traditional sense out there. . . . This record is wrapped in a jazz bed. This record is about fun. There is a balance. I wanted that reflected in the album. I wanted to touch on the subject of everyday people. . . . I believe artists have a responsibility to write, play, and sing about the problems that are going on in the world today. Artists have always been the reflections and the healing of society. . . . I was inspired by Earth, Wind and Fire . . . they had the perfect ingredients: great lyrics, great music, and still were popular artists.

Michael Powell

Michael Powell was at this time (2009) working with Anita Baker, a major recording artist figure who easily tracks her paths from Dinah Washington, Sarah Vaughan, and Billie Holiday. Powell's production in 1980s revolutionized popular music radio as he introduced live session musicians again, with very "jazzy" arrangements that broke us literally out of the disco and robo-produced electronics on the Madonna period stronghold and "saved us." I asked him in the beginning of the new projects in 2009 how he was managing this balance between jazz artistry and popular market expectations at the label.

Michael: The first thing is, quality never gets old. For her [Anita O'Day], the approach is to try to keep it fresh and new. Anita likes a lot of dark chords, keys. There are a lot of sonorities and progressions we don't hear any more. I tried to incorporate those changes for the new younger listener. We are trying to stay pop, but at the same time keep it musical without being "too jazzy." The hard thing about that as a producer is when you work with a certain caliber of musicians, the hardest thing is harness, hold back, be careful with voicings. Like Greg Phillinganes, he can take it there. No b9ths, no altered 13ths, you are trying to achieve a popular palate. Keeping it nice for the listeners, if you do use those extended chords. You really have to make a conscious effort to hold out. It's the musicality that we are trying to go for.

Bill: Did the label exec give you any restrictions or definitions?

Michael: They don't know what I am doing yet! But I'm just doing my old formula: great songs and melodies, and surround that with really great music. When the audience hears this, they should say, "Wow that's a great song, great voice, with great production." It should come all together. It's like, "Damn those ribs, look good, smell good, but it's pork!"

They want us to deliver a great record. When you get to this level, I want to approach it differently. This time, it's with live horns and live strings.

We want to take her musically to another level than we did before. I think the question is, "What is she going to do now? What is Mike Powell going to do now this time around? It's funny how certain chord structures take you there. but you have to sprinkle it with a little flavor and you can get away with it. And it comes out as something people will appreciate. I

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always try to do something that will stand the test of time, you really have to trust your ears and your heart. Jazz may just save us again!

Lee Ritenour

Spending time jamming and hanging with Lee Ritenour, I asked the industry veteran, one of the brains of the highly successful Fourplay, what was the conceptual thinking behind the formation of this group and how did it compare to classic fusion, or Grover Washington, or Kenny G? How did they distinguish their brand of more marketable jazz from “smooth jazz’s” identity? And did he take seriously the complaint that this form is watered down or selling out the soul of the music due to its commercial acceptance?

Lee: I’ve had a very interesting experience with the evolution of contemporary jazz, especially when it comes to the West Coast players who were there at the start of this—myself, Patrice Rushen, Dave Grusin, Abraham LaBoriel, Harvey Mason, Ernie Watts, Alex Acuña, Anthony Jackson, Al Jarreau, George Duke, Tom Scott, Larry Carlton, the Crusaders, Joe Sample. Many of us played in a place called the Baked Potato every Tuesday night for five years, starting in around 1974. The kids were lined up around the block starting at 5 p.m., but we didn’t start until 10 p.m.! But we were all coming from a jazz point of view. We had all studied jazz seriously and were respectful of what had come before us. We were in a period where Miles had just done those few albums including *Bitches Brew* and started crossing over. We were all coming out of this cycle where in the late ’60s we had this incredible rock music like Hendrix around. People like RTF were touring, Mahavishnu with McLaughlin was forming. Herbie and the Headhunters. So there was a fusion already of funky, church oriented, Latin fusion we saw even in someone like Horace Silver. We were all evolutions of this process along with David Sanborn, Bob James. This was a great period, and all very natural. Motown had moved to LA and we were session players too. It was a natural thing for us to incorporate all this music.

Now cut forward, and we began to be accepted on a radio station here called the Wave, around 1985. I could hear my music next to Steely Dan or Paul Simon. This was fresh, for a minute. The corporate powers actually termed the phrase “smooth jazz” and all of sudden we were all “smooth jazz players.” Pretty soon they were calling us up and saying,

"We love your record but can you take that high part of the sax solo out where he climaxes the phrase, because those notes are too shrill?" It got worse and worse and more diluted. I was invited several years ago to do a radio interview, and this guy was very hostile and said, "Don't you feel guilty and bad about being the creator of smooth jazz and destroying contemporary jazz?" I said, "I didn't do this. Those corporate guys did that, so that it's become a 'jazz Muzak.'"

Fourplay happened in 1990, and by this time the smooth jazz thing was entrenched. The way this came together was the most beautiful experience, because we did it for fun, no pressure, and we were given a budget. We decided everybody would write, and we picked the best tunes for the record. It was a million-seller. Then we started to get the pressure. Now it was to make a hit after that, to fit the radio programming format, to repeat a million-seller. It was the dynamic of the label guys. Most of these guys have retired or are at smaller labels now saying, "I wish I had let those guys do their own thing." But organically, that was just the music we wanted to make. When you are honest with yourself musically, you are going to hit a chord with audiences who agree with what you do musically.

Where does jazz live today? Given we have these various entry points, and simultaneously vying for some of the same audiences, same marketplace, and same desire to reach people with music, how does and where does jazz connect and live and mean today? There is again an incredible amount of product out there, almost too much. How does one distinguish between talent and just another pretty or cute face or sound? Is time being out there, sales, or a critic's liking the true measure of music that counts?

Marian McPartland

On this day, August 30, I've just spoken with veteran Marian McPartland, attending her 90th birthday celebration at the Tanglewood Jazz Festival, in Lenox, Massachusetts, the summer home of the Boston Symphony. And this speaks volumes about the "home and company" of jazz culture today. The festivals boast of the exuberance of excitement and support from jazz cruises to street festivals. Sitting in Ozawa Hall (named for famed Japanese conductor Seiji Ozawa) listening to contemporary jazz pianist Mulgrew Miller (d. 2013) and icon Ms. McPartland play, one has to consider the vibe of the environment. Jazz lives today in a variety of

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venues from concert halls, clubs, cruises, in the fingers and breaths of jazz ensembles in high school and college bands, on the radio, in record collections, and in the hearts of jazz lovers. In this setting, though, you sit quietly, no “Yeahs,” “Get down,” or “Go, man.” This would be inappropriate. This harkens perhaps to Billy Child’s criteria that jazz requires active listening, but here you are engaged in cerebral sharing. One notices Ms. McPartland’s artistic performing “shelf life” (well over 60 years of service) and the performances of repertoire too that have held up over more than half a century of artful years. Beauty, taste, and elegance are terms that come to mind. But watching these two is like watching old friends play choice games on a musical playground. Taking turns with melodies and tunes, and pushing each other on the swing, following each other’s new harmonizations, sliding down circular slides, quoting, and troping covering tunes, showing each other sand castles and destroying them together, laughing all the while through their fingers. The applause comes by their appreciation of all this, and it takes all this to “get it,” really.

David Baker

Bill: David, what do you make of this question of defining, understanding jazz and where it is and going, in your mind what have you seen?

David: The problem with the J-word is all the baggage that it brings with it now, that is what is different or what has changed over the years. I’m not sure it’s justified that we have this baggage, but it’s there, whether we want to admit it or not. My first response to you is in a question. People can only communicate based on the words upon which they can agree on its meaning, and the meaning is the same when they use them. So what is the composite, word, words that would divest the stigma? I mean, like the cat who invented the term *rock and roll*. It may be that whatever words are being used are not worthy of evoking the cultural landscape that you are referring to. The problem is, we have allowed the entrepreneurs to frame the problem in their terms, and you know what that means, whoever gets to frame the problem gets the say in what directions this is going to go. And so for me one of the things again is that the music now is seen almost like technology in the ways that it is propagated, the shelf life is so brief. When we [musicians] talk about music, it’s in completely different ways because we understand

that music didn't start yesterday and it didn't start in 1917, or when Europeans starting playing music. Unless we are able to frame it so there is a consensus that transcends the notes on a piece of paper, and these names. It must embrace all the cultural aspects that we deal with. Right now the music gets vilified because a record producer says this is going to be this way, and that's what "it is" We've never been allowed to set that frame for what it is.

The music is also reflective of how the people perceive it.

I remember in the 1940s, when all of a sudden there was Little Richard, but instead of Little Richard, people [mainstream culture] bought Pat Boone. It was because of whatever was going to be more profitable for the people who make the rules.

Then you also have Baraka on the one hand and Stanley Crouch on the other turning it into a boxing match between the two of them. So this is a perfect time to be talking about what does this music mean, what do we stand for? How can we reach another generation if we don't even agree on what this music is? We have to get people in the same room because there is something that is lost on the telephone, e-mail, and even in a book. But if we can sit down, have conversations and hash out ideas, and say, "Well look, this is what I see is wrong with that." It doesn't matter who writes the book; by the time it's in circulation, it's already in past tense. There needs to be a forum to deal with the vibrant and volatile ideas. Somebody has to take the bull by the horn and say, "Let's do this." We are deeply concerned about how things are being misappropriated. So does it start with a renaming of the phenomenon? What controls any movement in culture is about naming, because that's how we communicate with each other. So I'm wondering, is there something we can do? Duke refused to use the term *jazz*. And Miles was very upset about the term *jazz* because of all the baggage that it draws. And the fact now is that it has been turned into so many different things. All these things were a part of what it was, but not enough to get a full picture. It's like somebody pulling out a piece of a jigsaw puzzle and saying, "What is this?" It's a question of finding a language that people can agree on. There is no consensus today of what the music is and then there are all these fights over words, not ideas. This is the other reason that reinforces why the J-word is such a problem.

Bill: What changes have you seen over the years with your students, and how are they relating to music, both from what they come in knowing and where you take them?

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David: Yes, I have seen a change but it's a regression rather than a progression. They come in already with their concepts about what the music is, without any experience about how all these interactions have affected the original forms. And when this happens it's like not being able to see the forest because of the tree. I'm now restructuring and narrowing my classes down to the specifics and the important people and the important ideas, instead of trying to take care of everything and everybody that's out there. So it seems to me we have to start with a re-framing of what we are looking at. And the minute you connect the two, music and culture then you set up benchmarks that reflect the culture because the culture was there before the music.

Take the words *soul* and *smooth jazz*; we have to be able to draw distinctions between these, between Grover Washington, David Sanborn, and Kenny G. They want the trappings of jazz, to play "jazzy," but they want to play jazz. They are using the jazz, but the words are mispronounced, the wrong meanings, and over time when it is used this way then it's assumed a new meaning. When I say soul, I mean Aretha Franklin, James Brown, and the people who come out of that tradition.

But when people who have grafted onto it have covered this something that wasn't there from the beginning or something that changes the meaning of it, that's a problem.

I mean, do what you need to do for evolutionary purposes, but don't destroy the original while you do this. And without knowing the original, how can you know the benchmarks? Ninety percent of the problem here is how we use words. What this is about is considering a change of the language.

Billy Taylor

Billy: Jazz lives in places outside of the U.S. because they have come to respect the music and all the aspects of it as a means of communication, a way of making a point, the freedom to say what you mean, musically. When I think about my race, who invented this music, we have taken very little and made a world-renowned classic music, which has spoken to people all over the world. Jazz is the kind of music that showed that people who weren't allowed to speak had to develop a way to say things that were meaningful. And jazz was one of the ways to do this. So African Americans developed a music that spoke a freedom that was beautiful, and the world wanted to have this, the thing that was spoken musically. That's not happening, generally speaking, today

in jazz. There's nothing comparable to a Coleman Hawkins taking *Body and Soul* and playing for three minutes, and people listening to that and playing it over and over because it was meaningful to them. Jazz does not have the same relevance today, because it's manipulated by people who don't care about the music. The industry is doing things that are harmful to music. If you move to where we are today from Ellington, to Oliver Nelson, then Quincy, just these, that is music that was meaningful to a large amount of people, because it spoke of who we were, how we thought, something we could all share in, even if we didn't speak the same languages.

Jazz is not dead yet, but it's very close to it because there is no way we can compete with volumes, availability, in terms of the way the water has been muddied.

Bill: What must we do to be saved?

Billy: There are many who are doing things to keep the music needed and valued. We are all having the same problem and we have to go back to save our souls, but it's how we are going to have to take the next steps to putting the music in front of the people like they are doing with *American Idol*. Now that aspect is also what is killing the music. But, they know how to do this over and over again although it seems to serve no useful purpose because it's just the presentation of the same old things, duplicated. We have to do this better. Coltrane, Miles, Monk—they were trying to do something that reached the people, and they were saying something that was musical. They were also trying to take something but offer it down the line a little better, a little further, that's what the artists did. We have to take and find better ways to say this music to larger numbers of people, and not just copying things but making other people believe as we do. And we have to create programs, boat rides, festivals with the same fervor of excitement. We can't paint ourselves over there in the corner anymore.

Cadences

We notice in periods like the Harlem Renaissance, bebop, social protest, and the soul movement—with “the stakes so high, do or die, sell or fail, newly find, now redefine”—that true artists are deeply committed to expressive work that conveys who they are, the conflicts, the angst, and the triumphs of the human struggle for good and worse, music that matters. I

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think this (what the J-word means today) is a relevant question at a critically defining time. And that could mean being signed, on the charts, “in the mix,” and commercial or liked too. It is that art we hold to as blood, and what we in marked significant ways respond to in the long run, and what is required of jazz, art in this “commercial products/faces period.” One might say jazz today is not redefining itself or filling a void, and it is not providing for musicians an artistic space as it has done and needed to do in the past. That may be, as Esperanza said, “good” as this culture may not require it to “have a name” or provide community or be the only source material for new progressive musical art in the public commercial spaces. Jazz is a huge cultural form regardless, will always be, we guess because this is great music and artistry, no question. The question certainly is not “Is jazz dead?” or “What is its future?” It is the wrestling with the place of jazz in the marketplace, and its slighted identity as it lives in its own hard-won present. Where does it [the J-word] live to be a music that has connectivity in our times? Looking away from radio lists or pop polls, jazz is our creative music art form and its story is heard from one place consistently: among the many players in the fields. The participants are both new players in the game, old school, those who use turntables with a mojo, and those for whom the deepest meaning resonates only from the bottom pitches of a wood bass. The artistry of jazz today is as varied and in this varied voice comes its present, reflections of its past, and certainly its future. There are clearly a range of exciting and new artists participating in mainstream jazz today.

But jazz has never been about the work of a single artist or just one community, and its aesthetic movements have never single-handedly reigned at once, but crisscrossed in a sea of artists and audience approaches and likes. But the working definitions have come from many musicians working the language, the culture of improvisation, blues, to modern sonority and themes, connected to American living. Or as Maria Schneider so aptly put it, “The new reality is global. Through music in this present time, one can also experience a sort of citizenry of the world.” It is clear that all these artists agree that the critical ingredients of jazz are culture, history, mentoring, heroes, traditions, and finding your voice—and the definitions lie primarily in the priority to make music that has no restricting labels and yet holds onto traditions that have value. And that music has real meaning in our culture, especially when it connects

DON'T USE THE "J-WORD"

to the world we truly live in. Everybody here seems to agree as well that jazz music cannot be moved or taken from its culture, and that the real enemy of jazz may not be solely commodification, industry dictation, or label fabrication at all. Our own separations from the knowledge of the core root of jazz and its meaning as tied to its history is what pains us. It seems we have to find ways to dislodge the blockages in our culture that prevent young people from feeling and seeing examples of creative artistry that are iconic and relevant, and then challenge them to use that language to decode and explain the world they fit in and live in. For many of us, that would be the J-word. And maybe, as Spalding hinted at, this is a great time to be shedding old burdens of definition, justification, and unnecessary anxieties of its survival rate. But lastly, we will certainly need to be thinking about creating new environments, cultures, audiences, musicians, and institutions that the J-word can plant itself in: the loving soil of the souls of new listeners. The J-word has to also be wrapped around the people's moving, celebrating feet, and it has to be whispered, sung lyrically, and shouted meaningfully as the music that means the best of who they are and the beat to accompany where we are headed.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

CULTURE REFLECTIONS OF A CITIZEN

Can Somebody Wake Me Up?

Our casual response to perverse incentives . . . “like money, job advances being famous” are indications that things are bad, or the common saying, . . . “but it was not our place” to speak up. It’s “not my role.” . . . Picking up trash in a park, or public sidewalk with no one looking, as if it’s “your trash” is an example of citizen response excellence. Culture is the defining aspect that conditions how people respond. So we have to change our culture. Being concerned about the results of our connections, our service to one another is what needs to drive our actions.

—Dr. Martin Makary

Great horrors do not occur overnight, nor do they develop in a vacuum. They [our horrors] begin with small compromises unnoticed by most people. They advance on a wave of apathy, subtle appeals to selfishness and a loss of God-consciousness.

—Cal Thomas

Prelude

I had been moving to try and write a piece that focused on a few cultural social problems and the arts industry, but that moved toward seeing our creative agency as a model for relevant social thought and actions. I’m hoping for dialogues, for purposeful engagement about what we are doing together in our time.

I feel our cultural institutions, popular music, and traditional sacred institutions are connected and relevant spaces we live in.

I hope this essay gets closer to the balance of love and lift I’m trying to articulate in my workings. My essay-poem is focused on mainstream

cultural actions (or the lack thereof), our growing social silence and apathy, and the lack of civility and social actions in bringing about substantive and sustained examples of consistent voices in these matters. There is little change on or within our current cultural horizons from church leadership, politics, economics, or cultural-aesthetic charges that I can see or am aware of. This is why I am sharing this poem-essay in hopes of stirring more dialogue among citizens from many communities of concern.

Culture Reflections

Many things in our culture now are ready to be a scandal, it feels. Is it because we run quickly to breathe in the news spin-cycle we're fed, or is it because we are on autopilot, sleepwalking, responsible for crawling close to the cliff's edge not knowing?

There's too much "un-information" that is not usable, really—it's just more stuff to hang on your mind before it overloads and oversaturates you, and so we swim now with little land in sight. Truth is sometimes a disturbing idea. And so we wonder if maintaining a stable reality is a more important truth, or is it better to have a wake-up call?

Yes, the older people, my age group and older, messed things up. Today, there is a missing piece, a lost opportunity to link us that we dropped: mentorship.

My concern is that younger people seem destined to fall wherever the wind lands them, unaware that it takes some digging in and planting seeds for growth. Competency and excellence "need not apply." And accountability accounts for nothing. And this commentary is a larger American modern cultural damage and dysfunction. There seems to be little stability anywhere, except for McDonald's and Starbucks.

I'm always a supportive soul, so it seems odd to watch a building slowly falling as you see it coming at you and know it's going to fall. While war brews country to country, and cultural divisions rage in our incivility from community to community, our focus of identifying our moral and cultural failures should be less about the sport and TV talk of reality shows, and more about strategies to educate our citizens.

One of the great triumphs of modern society through technology is that injustice and abuses of the megaculture system we live in no longer sneak by in silence. So we speak. It's not that I don't have hope and belief

that this generation will win with smart and swift changes, but what I'm worried about is the timing of it all.

It's taking too long for consistent fruit, and the low hanging fruit is badly wormed, the soil is crusty and dry, and the tillers of the harvest are all very tired.

Music: Loud, Vacuous, Disrespectful, and Ugly

Today you can "vote in" who is talented, or we think is the cutest, our *American Idol*, or *The Voice*. When you believe in your gift, you have to stay in to win, and you work hard at it. That's artistry. The true definition of success is consistency and committedness, but you can't push buttons to get to this.

Consumers solely immersed in mainframe entertainment perhaps do not know the difference between music that is played and music that is programmed. They don't know the difference between writing a song or making a sequence and dropping a beat on it. It's all the same and there's no difference except there's more of the second choice, and it costs less and is easier to find.

Can we believe how much Hollywood spends on crime and police stories, crime labs, and lab detective dramas? Violent drama and "the bizarre" is the main subject of every TV night, Sunday to Saturday. Most of the nightly local news stories are told by people who are scripted to act and read about our laments and hurts, who got robbed, shot, and burned like they were rehearsed for a new movie role. It's all rarely focused on much else, a vicious cycle of bad human drama.

Media is fascinated by disturbing stories and not uplifting stories. Guns and blowing things up sell more tickets at the box office. How can we expect a healthy society when the picture of it is shown as violent, ruthless, greedy, and inhumane?

Cultural Criticism

Life is stranger than the stories you could make up about it. We are simply plummeting proudly into permanent patterns, cycles, and an abyss of insensitivity and short memory. Let's commit now to a diagnosis, a dialogue, and to digging into our demise.

You know as we watch these patterns over and over again, we are going to sooner or later slip in our own mess and have to wallow in it a while before realizing that it really stinks.

We don't take the extra care, the risk to hear one another, step up for one another, to reach out and offer comforting encouragement; instead we choose to stand on the safe side, sending an e-mail message or text.

We have to start in on our own block again and build forward, brick by brick, by first bringing together relatively like-minded folks. The best remedy and action forward is sensible talk, to share and to do things. But time, as the song says, "is truly wasting, there's no guarantee, but you got to face/fight the powers that be."

One man's corrupt system is another woman's corrupt mind, is another's man's broken promise, is another's lost dream, is another's utopia for five minutes, is another's peace of mind. Martin Luther King stated it best, "Where do we go from here, chaos or community?" A close friend told me, you have to learn to make the system work for you, gain the resources that enable you to build and invest in the things that represent and stand for what you value. I think that's correct.

A New Progressive Spirituality

Lord, where there is a mess, send us a message.

—A praying deacon, Pilgrim Baptist Church, St. Paul

Religion, the Church and "Cultural Relevancy"

Our shaking political, social, cultural, and financial foundations all seem to be in flux as fewer things are held onto and truly believed in. I used to be a more religious person. Now I'm holding my faith deep within me to sustain and not be stained by the mess all around. Our church traditions too often become a wreck of warm wind and whining, and spiritual leadership misses sustainable presentations of needed truth. As Sting sang, it all sounds like a game-show host. The problem is not that the ideas and actions, and certainly the convictions, are sacred or not, it's that institutions are run and ruled by men who are governed and work in systems that have little room for a community of people with conviction, care, or interest in any system changes. The church was always the place where the ideas,

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the thinking, and the actions in and of our society were heard, cultivated, and nurtured. The church today faces the challenge of becoming culturally relevant again in modern America. It must be relevant and radical—not reactionary, but responsive and real.

It makes sense to regularly tap into the resources of spiritually empowered women and men who are committed and provide effective programs and services in the neighborhoods and cities we live in.

Too many mainstream churches seem less connected and committed to substantive actions in our society. Yet these are the most relevant models for engaging the very spirit and center of communal and civic issues that touch and affect people's lives. In short, the church's voice today is muted, and its activist function is dormant. The best example of this occurred during the civil rights era, where we saw committed communities working at every level to change our society. That's still a model to study today.

Our hope is that our congregations, synagogues, temples, civic organizations, cultural centers, and political forums do more to raise civility and codes of excellence as standards in our communities again.

Building community partnerships, giving people agency, gaining spiritual depth, caring for one another, and taking care of our planet seems more in tune with the Divine command—which is again everyday revelatory, not reactionary.

Life Living

In arts and culture discussions, there is excitement about a broader range of topics we are able to address that reach and ring deep in sustained human expressions and experiences. Today, the free and fluid use of the Internet, new technological entrepreneurship, music innovations, the breaking down of restrictive barriers, and global discourses seen in youth movements are visibly “in play.” It is here that young poets dig in with progressive hip-hop and popular songs that advocate community action.

In my own work, I have thought it important to dialogue with national leaders in the fields, as well as local folks who contribute to the greater world to discuss ideas about the meaning of living on our planet.

There is a need even more today for a “higher-level” projection of common-folk culture. These reflections allow us to explore and identify the important things everyday people value, and not just interested in the

millisecond moments in culture. But we have to hope folks are interested, too, in the poetic-spiritual implications of the “people living narrative.”

Why can't creativity and ideas be a new core theme, and why doesn't this track in the commercial marketplace? Popular cultural impulses, used powerfully, can influence how we read meaning about who we are and what we value. That connection furthers our call to be alive.

Jean Cocteau wrote that music is a priesthood, not a pastime, so one way through this maze might be how to define cultural relevance anew. I don't doubt the current generation has its finger on important impulses today, too.

We sense there is social consciousness, but the triggers are different, struggles are different, and so the process and time for addressing this in today's forms are different. Like Dylan's “The Times They Are A-Changin’,” the messages still come, but the symbols have shifted. Yet there are songs today that still ring with meaning and relevance, but the language has shifted a bit. The landscape is different as well as who constructs and shapes it. Difficult to tell, or is it? Hollywood constructs our commercial dependency and destiny, one commercial at a time. So it's difficult to determine what the world is changing into, but it is clear it has changed.

Cultural engagement is the key with an eye on committed change. The more we share and care, the better we make a real difference in this world.

Perhaps some of this is just a generational thing. And maybe, if I was 25 years younger, I'd understand more of where we landed. But if you want to learn literature, you can't just read comic books because you like the stories and the pictures. We have to read all relevant texts from a broader table of contents than what is being offered by the mainstream media.

People always find the voice to speak loudly, speak the narratives that contribute and change.

A little more love in the world is never too much. You gotta keep moving, 'cause you never know when you gonna start losing. We must put a positive note out there to make the chord. As long as everyone moves on good paths and holds each other up, changing the world we are in, then we can turn all this around.

Our paramount focus must be on constructing a communit that connects us to the world we live in.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

HEALING AND ESCAPE FROM ZOMBIELAND

The first person I listened to was Sarah Vaughan. I couldn't leave her since then. Her voice tells stories. I understood why she had that kind of voice. My mother always said to me, "Look at those Black people's voices. They are so deep. They were born with that." In this class I started to learn why those voices were so deep. I posted a status on Chinese Facebook after we studied the Blues. China has myriads of types of music, but I asked why didn't China have our Blues? Black people made their music become the culture of the world. It is an incredible contribution. I think that the most beautiful thing that Black people did, wasn't to win the world, it was to make everyone in the world become one of them. They just sung their lives.

—Xiaoshu Chen, a former Chinese student

I've been concerned about the slip in the quality of mainstream popular music artists and culture. Commercial hip-hop song, style, and imagery—and much of Black popular music culture—has little interest, it seems, in telling the people who they are, where they are, and who they can become. Today's artistry must move beyond the momentary titillation fanned by this current media/entertainment industry. We have slipped into *Zombieland* on these issues. I have good reasons for my concerns.

During the lives of Black Americans in the 1940s through the 1990s, "the musician community" provided swing, gospel, bebop, R&B, free jazz, soul (Motown, Stax, Philly Soul), soul jazz, fusion, reggae, funk, hip-hop, and urban contemporary—all very different types of artistry but from the same root, same people, same conditions. Earlier generations passed on and pushed an "aspirational mind-set," to aspire beyond, toward a quality life mode, hard work, and accomplishment that buffered against disappointment and failure, and shut doors. The songs were high inspiration,

had a redemptive quality, a prescription for living, and they were imbued with community values. Song was a part of the social medicine: “Ain’t No Stopping us Now,” “Keep Your Head to the Sky.”

Given current trends in mainstream radio/media industry digitized culture, many of today’s artists are not being supported as they move in and on their own new directions artistically. There’s nothing that’s really memorable because everything is premade produced for them. Too much of making music has become so easy to do with fancy, fast technology and been made such a common commoditized product, a public game-show sport.

Black images and identities are today teased, tortured, and torched at the public stake. No place is that more evident in my mind than in contemporary popular music. I wonder if looking back on this we will remember this period of Black pop artists as the “musical walking dead”?

Some have argued that today’s generation seems to have little of a legitimate sustainable political-social-cultural agenda. Negative political forces as well as complacency and a sense of apathy are, today, systematically and culturally undermining some of the progressive forward gains of the civil rights generation group. A connected Black community consciousness is definitely gone. The retrenchment strategy used by corporations to reduce or even to discontinue services in order to benefit from market surplus is as well the PlayStation of the day.

There have always been people in place who could see, call, and catch the slip backward into these disparities. The “core commitment issues” on education, job training, housing, school segregation, or talk of race and class are all fading in the dialogue.

Today’s groups seem less aggressive on the concerns of gender equity or when they are being racialized in media practices with corporate identity markers in advertising.

A practice of what some have summed up as “parents who have provided well but not raised children well” has perhaps resulted in a group for whom the traditional struggles, values, and historical narratives are a zero issue. And even presented with long-held examples of cultural productivity, with the death of an icon like Maya Angelou, for example, a friend noted recently an overheard conversation where two young college-age women were asking, “Who is that, and how is her contribution to culture as relevant to us as the work of Jay-Z and Beyoncé?” These are real shifts.

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We have the Internet. But I'm actually concerned that we in the long run may be cheapening the value of our exchanges and representations there too. The reason? We have lowered the value point on everything because it's mostly free, and presumed in far too many instances that everybody is everything and it's all OK.

The Internet, due to unlimited access all the time, allows anyone to produce and post whatever they want to say, whatever their dream is, ideas they have, creativity unearthed. This means everybody from 7 to 27 to 70 is talking all the time. What separates them is their experience in real life, not in virtual push-button digitized spheres, but that doesn't matter anymore either, thus the problem. Because our attention span is fragile and we are oversaturated with so much, we do miss critical good stuff, and who's really listening very closely anymore? We have landed ourselves now in a bit of a "genie out of the bottle scenario." This needs balance and a harness, or we will find that our critical exchanges and creations now have depreciated values, and that will be a costly error indeed. If we are not careful, services, goods, and people will all be deliverable formats made relevant through and by being a product online.

These values and concerns show up in cultural expressions across the board as well, because the definitions, media, and meanings have changed, they've shifted. There has been a large system cultural shift in several areas. Even though we are making connections here between presenting an aesthetic argument on cultural and generational grounds, we still have to be mindful that it's all mixed up in a digital new business world that isn't particularly run to underline the care and hope of culture.

So what now?

Time to work on a new order, a way of thinking, a consideration of strategies, and then do the consistent work of substance and sustainability. Cultural expressions like music resonate in human-spiritual zones and are property of the people, not the corporations. Wouldn't it be something, though, if our churches, synagogues, temples, and communities with support of local radio would bring folks together to create sustainable programs of community-focused news and information, arts, education, and political talks? This could create "community theaters"—a Guy Ramsey idea. The idea, as he stated, was to "Combine to form living photographs, rich pools of experiences, and a cultural poetics upon which theoretical and analytical principles can be based. . . . I hope to give some idea about

how I learned that music possesses a power; in particular, the power to mean something important about the world around me.”

1. A retune, reboot, of the system. Today, music programming is mostly governed by marketing sales ploys, devised and based solely on business needs to feed the market and profit from topical style and fashion surges. Change the agendas.
2. Young musicians need to be able to feel encouraged to make music that makes their soul sing and touch people to give human joy, not to chase constructed toys and plots and ploys.
3. Our focus needs to be shifted to the music, not the market, and from consumerism to community care and concern.

The market follows the dictates and demands of the art, not the other way around. There need to be venues and media shows that illustrate what musicians and artists really talk about: their love in making music because of music.

This is the information, the story, that the public needs to see and hear. And the beat and the rest will all follow, and that’s how we move from cultural Zombieland to cultural theaters, to working together again to create a better living culture than we have right now.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

CRITICAL CULTURAL CONCERNS TODAY

When we were little, our mother used to sit us down at the radio to listen for direction from the music.

—A concerned colleague

We must frankly acknowledge that in the past years our creativity and imagination were not employed in learning how to develop power. . . . When a new dawn reveals a landscape dotted with obstacles, the time has come for sober reflection, for assessment of our methods and for anticipating pitfalls. . . . None of us can pretend that he knows all the answers. . . . In our society power sources are sometimes obscure and indistinct. Yet they can always finally be traced to those forces we describe as ideological, economic and political. We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. . . . This may well be mankind's last chance between chaos and community. . . . We are now making the choices which will determine whether we can achieve these goals in the forthcoming decades. We cannot afford to make these choices poorly.

—Martin Luther King, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* 1967

As an artist, two questions arise in my thinking when I reflect on King's great book: the social question and the creative one. The questions arise much like King's classic title, *Where Do We Go from Here, Chaos or Community?* out of the kind of never-ending, always ramping/vamping up on government social-political divides, race and class divisions, and general citizenry deterioration. What kind of society do we have the will to endure?

The reason why this is important from a creator's perspective is that you cannot just make art in the world; you have to as well have a conversation, an awareness of how art is made in the world: the social question.

There are definitely things on the spiral down, and yet due to cultural and technological advances, we still witness evolutionary miracles. I can't remember a more capable generation of young people. This generation has everything—everything except for stability and grounding.

Before you can build on a new world, it's got to settle down from its crumbling first. Then given what's left, what do the people really care to care about today? This is consideration number one!

Sociologists who recognize changing trends point to two major “difference factors” today: (1) the absence of a traditional family values code and (2) the break from religious, spiritual rites, institutions, and instruction that then buffered, shielded, or kept all under a bubble. These cultural covers helped to keep people from larger social decay and instilled among participants a moral, citizenry ethic that helped to engender rules, codes of a social order. Or kind of, sort of did . . .

But today, that bubble has been long gone, and we are all exposed and swim through a media- and technology-driven and commodity-products-forced-on-us modern social cosmology. This is shaking our mental spaces.

But it's not just spiritual wastelands that are the problem, it's the “land of the living and nongiving” that this generation has inherited. We in modern times have forgotten how to invest in our human infrastructures, and today people are less encouraged to care for anything except for their own empty survival.

A social concern is fracturedness and distractedness. Today younger people have to find ground in sinking and shifting sands where it's this new thing, then that new thing over there, then in 10 minutes it's gone away.

There's a lack of stability and grounding, so there's few things that can be trusted in as cemented. They are taking in so much so fast, but because everything is a fast, fluid moving target, nothing “stays in” to hold onto. A culture based on fast, fluid, ferocious, and more “go find” is driving us crazy, actually.

I feel their frustrations too, as most of the things they see and are left with to work from are all electronics fast market constructed.

And the rest of us too are trying to search now for new definitions and meanings of cultural relevance as the landscapes are mostly in the new gear.

Many of the prevalent pathologies noted among our contemporary exchanges—like incivility, anger, rudeness, and brokenness—seem increased

due to a lack of substantive discussions, methods, or examples of sustainable communal-care practices that diffuse despair and brokenness.

While I acknowledge that most of these fears are an older person's fears, and I would not rob today's generation of its own struggles to learn, there must be a dialogue across these lines of generational divides. It is only in that formula of listening and working that any of this will matter and that solutions will come.

Now for the culture question:

People, each generation, only grow in a healthy way when the people's cultural treasures are defined according to the culture's knowledge of itself and its ability to create sustainable presentations of its meaning, history, and focus forward. When a culture forgets that, it dies.

I think it's critically important to document, in cement, and present "another culture line." The only thing that is representative, that maintains a vestige of our heritage, is our culture. Without it, you have zero—or cultural chaos.

What they are selling us is a formula, a pathology of lowered standards and little substance, not much beyond getting over on a hustle, more stuff, or keeping each other down.

One can't forget Donald Trump's infamous line "You're fired," and then the next crazed cultural ridiculousness, and the questions hammered at a sitting president about his birthplace!

So we have to raise up the boats on all sides, and culture has an aspirational, ascendance, attainment aspect in it that lifts the people, carries them, and allows them to dream clearly. Fire them upward, not fire them and burn them down.

Arts Citizenry

We have all the power to create a new vision for our society fit for a new generational impulse. Unfortunately, most of what we get to see and hear projected in mainstream venues is a chase for fame, busted commercial gain, and playing the "keep your face in the media" game. Every generation we know of previously seemed to have a collective view of the value and purpose of their creative outputting—until now. Black music culture had been one powerful model to study, because of the "heightened tenet points of relevance"—social, cultural, political, spiritual, and aesthetic.

The period of the 1960s through the early '90s was the golden period of a kind of articulated social relevance.

The earlier traditional generations passed on and pushed an “aspirational mind-set,” and its songs provided inspiration and a prescription for living. They were imbued with community values. Song such as these were a part of the social medicine.

“Ain’t No Stopping Us Now”

“Keep Your Head to the Sky”

“Wake Up, Everybody”

“Shining Star”

“Higher Ground”

“Ball of Confusion”

“What’s Going On?”

How are we going to live in the world that we live in now?

In light of this dual track of culture in a society in chaos, I believe there must be “culture examples,” which are rich lessons about contribution, survival, and making the world better. When you engage in great music, art, ideas, dance, literature, and great musicians, you get inspired to do great things in life and to contribute. Art in earlier periods many times represented ideas and carried contained critiques that created popular identities and powerful imaginative mythologies within the megaculture. This happened amidst a cultural tone where a song said, “Free Your Mind and Your Ass Will Follow.” Music and art fit into collections of ideas and values about the way people live in the world. So the musical/artist makes conscious decisions about the contribution he/she wants to make, and how it will fit within the cultural system, society, and a code of values.

I don’t dislike hip-hop or today’s youthful impulses. What I don’t like are all the noise, distractions, and corporate trickery masked as free market that distort fervent minds and disrupt young people’s souls.

When we talk about a mainstream contemporary popular music and then move to corporate commodity poison, one can clearly identify the tracks of a cultural demise. So much of mainstream popular music—its posture, content, and emphasis on emptiness and flash, “not music,” and largely undergirded with Hollywood culture—is empty madness.

You can see how creative musicians—Teddy Riley, D’Angelo, rappers like Guru—made legitimate cultural links to jazz, Africa, poetry, the tools for the mind. You can see community and culture linkages. Hip-hop in this way is clearly a Black music family member with all the rights, privileges, and associations right there. The switch clearly got flipped and turned off in the monetization of the megaculture labeling. Success brings suffocation. “Money chase in your face” began to drive the cultural aesthetic, and once that happens, oversexed imagery, me-ism, sexism, and gangster-ism easily become a normative perspective. Moreover, people become desensitized and undermoralized and there is now an affinity for commercial and financial success symbols and their meanings and values. That’s what happens to culture: It gets twisted really fast and unrecognizable. This is where education becomes such a critical piece in our current need for cultural maturity.

The New Manifesto Forward

It’s hard not to sound “preachy,” but our culture could use some adjustments. My concern is that the entire megacultural infrastructure right now is dialed up on a prescription for talented people to be cute and entertaining for five famous minutes, making money by selling something.

So the model now is duplication, replication, cut and paste, push the button, fast results. Innovation, developing your unique voice, and the integrity of art and reflection have little sway in the swag of the day. I’m fascinated with the fact that tweeting, the Facebook community, texting, YouTube-ing are all still a lot about power. It’s all about “me and my ability” to decide on or influence ideas, my ability to gather information, data, to control what I have in “my mind” to do, to increase my visibility, “likeability,” or how I want to influence you or gain your patronage, affiliation, or association with me.

The greater numbers one has to affirm that relationship, the better one feels to be positioned to effect “my-me goals.” If I’m selling something, then the power I have is one of commercial benefit to push a number of units to this associated number of friends and followers. Despite all the reports of an Internet connectivity, through Facebook, blogs, and electronic iteration, certainly people are fast responding to their worlds and engaged, but there are still not enough sustainable actions rising to address any of the cultural costs of all this critically.

Clearly there are viable choices of consciousness tied to change; one sees many active blog examples, and some good consequences are felt here. Blog buzz and charged up, yes, but there's little indication here that there are any substantive cultural changes moving us forward.

The majority of the public media projections in the entertainment/arts industry is focused on bad contemporary themes, problems, and celebrations in mass stupidity. There is only violence, "Holly-dream" televisual utopia-hazed scripted series, expensive and horribly bad movies, unrealistic plastic comedy spoofs, and more and more crime shows.

The key to historical, societal preservation—which is what we need to ensure value aspiration—is arts and culture. These narratives and songs provide images and ideas, which are ideal ingredients for spiritual sustainability that is inspiring, meaningful, and ultimately life changing.

But this is no romanticized, easy-pie arts argument.

The challenge is getting the right balance of facts, figures, images, and ideas to the right group, the right way. It's all about a creative pedagogy, the ability to connect these ideas in a sustainable, meaningful way. It's neither academic nor rocket science; we can produce a better cultural environment to live and breathe in, and our collective goals could be about giving to and for each other.

I teach this generation of young artists, and we do get to ask these questions a lot, and I get to teach the implications of these ideas. I get to watch young artists venture out to try and be the next John Lennon, Hendrix, Ellington, or Sarah Vaughan. I also get to teach such a perspective regularly and gauge as an artist and an educator what these things mean to younger artists over the years. I get to hang out with a fair number of famous artists of many stripes, and sit and ask them about their roles as culture carriers.

The main question I pose is: What kind of contribution are we really ready to make in our society, culture?

The Bloom Challenge Returns, Again (Social and Arts Cultural Construct in Chaos)

I have my students read and respond to the 1987 essay from Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*. In this writing, Mr. Bloom lumped much of what we can identify as mainstream pop music/culture

as “junk food for the soul” and as possessing an antithetical relationship to higher learning, civilized living, and culture. He calls pop a “masturbational fantasy” that ultimately raises threats to our sociological balances in rationality and leads us in a barbaric inhumanity away from the order of society.

He believed, even as late as 1987, that young people would have a crippled imagination and a loss of moral, spiritual values, and that due to much of pop music’s lack of sense of sonic harmony and its disunity, we would be unable to uplift human subjects to higher understanding of the good, the just, the beautiful, and the thoughtful. We’ve heard this all before. It becomes all too memorable and real when we remember that that’s exactly what they said about Black music every decade since 1910 before Bloom.

But, as well, we sadly feel indebted in an awkward way to social critics like Bloom who keep the fire and the questions raised: What has happened to our societal balances as presented in so much of popular culture? It has all mostly gone mad!

Applying “Bloom’s cultural doom” to today’s pop landscape, yikes—he may have been onto something, as his analysis is on point, but perhaps for the wrong reasons and definitely placing the blame at the wrong set of feet. Today, many of us are thinking about questions of our contemporary identity being totally defined within the sales marketplace, the idea of problematic cultural representation, navigating technology’s role in determining aesthetic force, the ways our art is being marketed, the question of the role of arts, today’s negative/positive impact on this generation’s view of the world, the role of the musician in social/cultural advocacy, and the role of education in providing training for young people to be wholly prepared as we explore the social/creative conditions of culture in the marketplace.

There are “Big Problems, Troubling Trends” that are affecting the larger culture now: increased entitlement, distractedness, drives toward “immediate me gratification,” wanting attention every second (Facebook, texts, “reality TV-me”). Traditional cultural tracking is disrupted. Internet and Wi-Fi are free—yet anything left free gets taken, used, and then abused.

Our list of problems and trends goes on, and it doesn’t matter whether you’re a digital native or old school: technology’s role in determining aesthetic force, cultural voice, corporate vice, the problematic ways our art is

being marketed, the downsizing and downloading of musical products, the shrinking of musicians' and artists' ability to command fair income for their artistic product, the role of the musician in social/cultural advocacy of social justice issues, the economics of the recording/entertainment field, the context of arts/music meaning and application for social/cultural development, artist-citizenry, its local-global applications, the increasing need for more unified foci on progressive meaning, and applications in arts engagement in our world.

Our practices in music/arts and education must meet the demands and needs of the world we live in, in ways that are practical, connecting, meaningful, and relevant.

An Economic Epistemology

A recent article (May 2014) cites a \$3.2 billion sale of Beats headphones and electronics to Apple Corp. Beats had been owned by 49-year-old rapper/producer Dr. Dre; this deal could potentially make him the first hip-hop billionaire.

His current business worth stands at \$550 million, slightly behind his colleague in "hip-hop mogul town," Puff Daddy, at \$700 million.

This is Apple Corp.'s biggest purchase yet. This, of course, given market movement magic these days, made this a happy deal move. The entire world seems to be trending strongly on "all that matters is what makes the cover story." Beyoncé graces the cover of *Time* magazine (May 2014), as one of the top 100 most influential individuals today, as her husband, Jay-Z (worth \$550 million according to *Forbes*) graced the cover of *Vanity Fair* in a story calling him "the new chairman of the (music) board."

One industry spokesperson stated, the Beats–Apple deal "speaks to a nice young demographic, which is really interesting to marketers." Even though the Beats are overpriced, *Daily News* reports, "the kids go crazy for them"—which brings me to feel we are now in a standard of new normalcy where market forces define how much cash you can amass, how much attention you get, and an ethic based on what the "kids go crazy for." These principles together rule the day in mainstream music enterprises now. Popular culture and youth crazes are nothing new, but it sho' do feel different now.

The question for artist/musicians becomes: Where, what, in which format way, and in what marketplace play, is your art relevant, if any more, in any way?

Deconstruction of the Mega-Slave System

Who's creating the definition of popular entertainment culture right now? I was actually quite inspired by a segment of *The Voice* recently, where Usher and Jill Scott coached singers on interpretation, voice support, emotional cadence, and "saying something" with your song.

That's "old school," or as I like to say, "the school."

The definition of what we see as mainstream/main-street music culture today has shifted, so we watch those shifts and address the good and bad, the why, what, and how, and where do we go from here? Today's challenge is now one of distancing from the pervasive tendencies to be smothered over with complacency, laziness, "easy push-the-button" mentality that is so pervasive, and that breeds the unprecedented levels of disrespect, incivility, and entitlement that are worn today so proudly. We need a radical reboot of our social-cultural aesthetic platform-program if it is to be inclusive and connected to today's generation and its artists, audiences, and this society. We simply have to create another "through the wire hook-up" because our traditional lines won't connect.

The Critical Issues Facing Arts Education

After several years working on a curriculum that Quincy Jones commissioned me to research and write, I came to the conclusion that the gene pool for music talent has not changed. As a matter of fact, it has regenerated at higher ability levels. The excitement about doing music has increased, and the metacultural visibility has quadrupled. The places that music is available, and what people have access to is a hundred times whatever we had back in the day.

What has dramatically shifted with no turning back is "the cultural consciousness climate," which is today's mind-set on what art means and how it matters to people, and our cultures. No matter how many scales we teach, it is still in the hands of a new generation for whom music has in some cases radically different meanings, and there is no turning back.

This shift is major modulation. For example, you can sense this in conversations around the ethics involved in preparation or aspirations toward achievement. “Digital natives” may acquire things and ideas through a tribal social networking, sharing content and means to get at it. Here you notice a radical shift in the value of obtaining things and goals from a more traditional “old school” orientation. Original, individual thought and critical thinking have shifted to shared platforms, enhancing the speed of gathering information. The ethics that says you can achieve what you want because you have direct access has replaced an ethics that is prepared for appreciating the long haul and aspiring hard work to make it in the world, and not it being made for you.

Music, poetry, images, dance, and ideas are the artist’s public spirituality, our priesthood. We have to continuously change the world. That kind of commitment is what, for me, is lacking. Where are the replacements for Bob Marley, Nina Simone, Joan Baez, the Arrested Development, Bob Dylan, Dave Matthews, and India.Arie?

I believe that many of the lessons we learned from great artists were the lessons of focus, dedication, skill development, commitments, passion, courage, and integrity—the threading and the connecting of the dots, the chain-of-life lessons we need for survival as citizens. The artist-humanist-thinker’s job is to keep the eyes on the prize of great humanity-ism, and to underline these lessons. This is the kind of contribution we must make together as citizens.

It is crucial to have conversations about the way our world today is spinning, in what direction, and why.

So, as King suggested, it’s all about getting to the power, to the feet of those forces we describe as ideological, economic, and political. Secondly, only in dialogues across ideological and generational lines can progressive and meaningful adjustments and shifts happen.

But also there needs to be a courageous stop and a decisive abandon of the drugs of our social destruction. The sugar’s not good for us, y’all! The party has got to end or we will never be able to find home again. The TVs, gizzagomatrons, “blackbluebananaberry,” and “me phones” must be shut off so people can talk to one another directly. The music is way too loud, we are oversaturated and buried under, there’s just too much, there’s way too much free unchecked, uncharted information to take in. People have to start carrying and caring for real. As King warned, “When a new

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dawn reveals a landscape dotted with obstacles, the time has come for sober reflection, an assessment of our methods and for anticipating pitfalls. . . . None of us can pretend that he knows all the answers. In our society power sources are sometimes obscure and indistinct.”

We must all have the courage to say to ourselves political correctness will never bring us to correct any of this. We must be critical and courageously committed to reordering our cultural diets. These are the critical concerns; now what are we going to start doing together to make some changes?

I want to close with sharing my end-class note given to all my students because it best articulates what we wrestle with as we try to share what we mean by the struggle of progress today, and cultural chaos as artists.

The main thing is to try and get to see your work as culturally relevant. It's important to connect into and with the society and the culture you live in. Artistic perspectives are shaped by the dynamics of history and culture. Music is not merely a craft of practiced sounds; it's more a collection of rehearsed memories in sound, notes, of what it feels like to experience life.

The point is, if you are conversant with what's going on today and aware of how we have gotten here, you are better situated to be able to make a contribution. The music that you make is a sounding of that deeper appreciation and understanding.

You might consider this an aesthetic, social solidarity of mutual respect. It represents what thinking artists care about and say is the art, how they approach it, what they believe their purpose is, and their understanding and meaning of art. In exploring artists' work viewed in this way, you note a certain attentiveness to the development and delivery of artistic craft. And in the best cases, there tends to be a great embrace and celebration of identity, individuality, and a real care for carrying on culture. The best way to study the history of art/music is to see it in cultural context.

Seeing the music this way is through the actual footsteps of musicians who lived and walked in music while shaping the worlds they lived in.

I want to encourage young artists to deeply contribute and further the art in their own new ways. And I hope artists will maintain a good balance of traditions and practices that are essential to cultivate; the greatest is using our gifts to touch and inspire lives and to contribute to our world as citizens.

CHAPTER TWENTY
**THE SONGS WE NEED
TO BE HEARING AGAIN**
Music Culture and a
Musician's Credo to Citizenry

This is from a talk given at the Monadnock Summer Lyceum talks, Peterborough, New Hampshire, July 27, 2014, broadcast on National Public Radio.

People get excited, drawn in from the feeling it [music] gives. They are looking for an experience, that's the draw card. They want to experience their humanness, and music provides the output. We've started to move away from the skill of direct human, civil communication. Everything is handed to us now, but we are still always needing to return to the need to relate humanly. Music allows us to find meaning and a way back, when all other emotional territories seem destitute and barren.

—Dr. Krystal Banfield

I've been excited to be here for some time. I knew for years about the MacDowell colony. I'm very appreciative to my dear colleagues and the committee for inviting me here today. Your own series theme here—"to inform, to engage, to inspire"—provides the best paths forward, I believe. I was very moved by something one of your recent speakers said at this fine historic series. "Our casual response to perverse incentives"—like money, job advances, being famous—"are indications that things are bad, or the common saying 'But it was not our place' to speak up, or it's 'not my role' [but] picking up trash in a park or public sidewalk with no one looking, as if it's 'your trash' is an example of citizen response excellence. Culture is the defining aspect that conditions how people respond," said Dr. Martin Makary.

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To be sure I began my share correctly, I quoted my wife. And what I hear from her words is the essential, most important element in being a cultural carrier, an artist within society.

That art draws people in because of the feeling it [music] gives. And that they are looking for “an experience” that centers them in “their humanness,” and music/art provides that meaningful connection. People are genuinely interested in what this means to creative people as well and what that tells them about the process of creativity.

That’s what I want to share in short today, some snapshots of how we musicians think about our creative work in today’s society, what it means, and the implications of that artistry over time. Jean Cocteau wrote that music was a priesthood, not a pastime. So there’s been a ton of talk about what the value of art is beyond just the sound, feel of it. What should it represent, do, and mean within human experience, history? These are questions of phenomenology, aesthetics, historical significance, and cultural markers. All my moves forward now are predicated on this idea. Our culture could be further informed to better situate our living, [our] humanness, and arts education is a powerful tool and indicator of the possibilities of that forward motion. Again, this is the power of the arts to create; carry the messages of meaning; charge to be imbued with those meanings; change be a part of the working forward; critique question injustice; cultivate, plant, grow more ideas; and connect community in culture—the 7 Cs of culture. Everything I value and see as forward, relevant, is predicated on this. My concern too is that much of the megacultural infrastructure right now is dialed up on a prescription for talented people to be cute and entertaining for five famous minutes, and making money to sell something. So the model is duplication, replication, cut and paste, push-the-button, fast results. Innovation, developing your unique voice, and the integrity of art and reflection have little sway in the swag of the day. I don’t think music and arts will change the world alone, but I must confess, I believe in it.

The key to historical, societal preservation is arts and culture. These narratives, songs, provide images, ideas, ideal ingredients for spiritual sustainability that is inspiring, meaningful, and ultimately life changing. The challenge is getting the right balance of facts, figures, ideas, music to the right group, the right way. It’s all about pedagogy, the ability to connect these ideas in a sustainable, meaningful way.

Pedagogy of Musical Purpose

History as culture, I'm taking in these years to be immersed in dialogue with scholars, historians, artists, and institutions around engagement in history/culture as a guide to direct our thinking, appreciation, and as a model for addressing strategies in study, methods with practical meaning, application. A goal is to concretize a working cover-all aesthetic that undergirds teaching, creating, contributing, and sharing and to document the culture. If you are going to live as an artist in this life, a significant part of that living is giving. It's critical to have a set of ideals in play and instructional focus, materials that arouse and put in place "an aspirational" excitement about music meaning, aesthetics, affect, and societal impact, and make that equally connectable to what the definition of great musicianship is. Today's young aspiring musician is getting a huge amount of information, impressions, and representations of the world from multiple varied sources in modern culture. This heightens our needs to address the buried foundational functional, to lift up for them the more sustainable defining characteristics of sound musicianship, focus, dedication, and artistic values, worth, and purpose. The most important thing we can do for young people today—besides being supportive of their goals in music—is our guidance in helping them to see past this current-day corporate-design fabricated culture, and imbue them with better models to check out and explore and learn from. This is critical and relevant because it raises up the value of "arts forward."

Traditional music education/philosophy erred, as Paul G. Woodford noted in his *Democracy and Music Education*, because they "assumed all children everywhere should aspire to an attempt to uniformly replicate 'definitive' expert performances of the Western masterworks . . . they failed to develop the philosophical/cultural understandings, teaching models, and pedagogical strategies that would help them accomplish their democratic goals [thus being] divorced from the real musical world and its [our] social problems, not adequately representing the nature, value, and purpose of music education in [contemporary] democratic society."

The appreciation and study of popular music carries in it a flowering effect of both artistic expression and contemporary social engagement at the real human-social-cultural-political boundaries. Today, the majority of our concerns in the arts industry fields are focused on these contemporary themes, problems, and celebrations.

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Identity, representation, navigating being a digital native or old school laborer, technology's role in determining aesthetic force, the ways our art is being marketed, cultural voice, corporate vice, the downsizing, downloading of musical product and the shrinking of musician/artist ability to command fair income for their artistic product, the question of the role of arts, popular culture and the question of it being negative/positive on this generation's view of the world, the role of today's musician in advocacy of social justice issues, economics of the recording/entertainment field, and the role of education in providing training for young people to be wholly prepared.

Our practices in music/arts and education must meet the demands and needs of the world we live, in ways that are practical, connecting, meaningful, and relevant.

Scholars/artists talk a lot about building on collaborative dialogues in arts practicum, philosophy, methods, and creative expression to enhance and broaden education approaches, research, and creative programming. Business/community partnerships focused on music and society initiatives and music's importance and impact today allow a bringing of their professional experience to meet the new challenges in music/arts, performance, education, media, digital environments, and the increasing need for more unified foci on progressive meaning and applications in arts engagement in our world.

Social movements generate new knowledge, new theories, new questions, concrete intellectual engagement for confronting systems of oppression. Progressive social movements, the best ones do what great poetry does, transport(s) us to another place, compel(s) us to relive horrors, and more importantly, enable(s) us to imagine a new society.

—Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams,
The Black Radical Imagination*

The Artist/Educator's Inside View

Artistic process as part of the artist's journey to grow and then shape the world he or she works in is an important study. That's the number one question people want to know: What is your process, and what do you believe about art, creativity, what drew you to being an artist? What do

you all talk about and do, when you do what you do? And so, as with Dr. Makary's idea of culture that it is the "defining aspect that conditions how people respond," that premise is what I want to underline. My feelings about history as "essential" to arts education in this discussion remains strong and firm in these themes. This generation eats and gets from the culture an ahistorical, quick inform, easy push-button gadget layer of life. A study of Woody Guthrie clears, cleans, and prepares: "This guitar kills fascism (commercialism)." Music as an expression of our human condition and what that is from the inside stories of artistry in our history, through to the present, and then, what that means for what could come in shaping our world today is critical for me.

This is part of our focus to look at and listen to some music together. Let's have some fun while we explore and decode these conventional aesthetic puzzles. I'm not a historian, I'm a forwardian.

Actually, I could have been very helpful to President Obama. I would have said, "President Obama, invest in arts/culture too, then the country would be inner-soul healthier, and they'd have been ready for all you are trying to do." The arts carry cultural healing, awareness, and humanness. It's one with education, one of our top investments to dedicate to, and for the long haul coverage. I think too we want to raise up a few helpful themes to connect and ground us: cultural context, "aspirational charges," identity, and revolutionary ideals.

Cultural Context

Everybody's defining aspect, that which helps to ground their experiences, their lived condition, that mirrors too how we respond and live, is predicated on many cultural context expressions. Music in this way as a human history marker is worthy of our listen. There isn't a person here, tone challenged or perfect pitched, who is not defined and recognizes music that happened significantly during important growing times in their lives.

That's not new breakthrough science, although I'd love to claim the wisdom. It's just how we come to be shaped in modern American popular culture.

Now what you probably don't get to hear enough of is (a) what that music meant to musicians who created it; (b) what was the meaning and impact, looking back now, of how we have come to talk about it; and

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(c) how those factors factor into where we are and going in new styles, impulses, and processes, and how that may be a critical component of understanding culture.

Now that is the greatest gift art gives us sociologically. It can be a tremendous gift, a tool in connecting to others, and an aid in understanding human experience and condition. For the artist, that is the single most valuable component of art expression—its capacity to capture significant human experiences and give those back to people. It's a "humanities high-value" quality. The Roosevelt social experiment in the 1930s, the New Deal, was connected to the value of arts collecting, archiving, and with putting artists to work—because, as the Makary quote points to, culture is the defining aspect that conditions how people respond, be, and contribute to the world they live in.

Our social consciousness has been thwarted, though, and compromised as courage to speak meaning to power has been swapped for political correctness. Today, the reasons for our escalating social insensitivity, incivility, is because we ingest so many problematic images, messages, and cultural practices in media, music, and manufacturing processes focused on market demands, prescriptions to make money. This corrupts deeply.

As an artist, I always say, we must resist. We notice a frayed, disrupted central core value system that cannot sustain all the eruptions on the top soil.

My focus is much more narrow these days, interested in work, ideas, art that lifts, inspires, and highlights our human capacity to make a better world. We think we need a new song to sing. That kind of new song is the kind of song or innovative art where ideas move people to change the world.

Today, young people have even sharper minds and faster tools, and there are better examples for them, if they are led to choose smartly. If the music and art do not address the problems, the problems don't get sung about and there are fewer notes that ring out to reach out to and from the people, if the music dies. But the art can't only be about a fuss and a fight, it must include the positive forward. Let me take my old fart, nostalgic "we had it better back in the day rose-colored utopia dream bliss" glasses off, for a second and say today in hip-hop to Kurt Cobain, to Bruno Mars and Adele, from these artists you can find the most fabo songs written as well.

You have to be a good student of the culture you occupy in order to realize, garner, the lessons learned from that life observation. The details

that dangle in view are impossible to miss, and benefits are immediate. Not keeping up with the Joneses but keeping them in view from all sides of the track provides anybody with an understanding of the worlds we live in.

This question, what kind of world do we live in, what does the world (culture) value and how does one fit, permit, and sit in—this is essential. Every generation has its rights and destiny to assemble its warriors, battle strategies, songs. But in that is always a prescription for its sustaining survival, not its end.

What we've noticed, is the amount of certain core values, an appreciation of communal connectivity and artistic development has shifted, and the industry invests in and promotes a higher number of projects that focus more on empty commercialism and me-ism and mine, mine, more mine, and certainly less from the mind. We can see/hear a definite shift from these central core values of meaning. No one is saying the world has come to an end or that empty commercialism is a new problem. But we are certainly in a different mind-set now in terms of what is uni-human defined.

We can alter, affect the thinking and actions in the world, the communities we live in. We see so many examples of proactive creative work that changed people's lives. But that art, song, that creative dreamscape, was beautiful, powerful, and was compelling and contained meaning. It was well crafted. There is a change both in terms of the intentionality of things and the devastating reality and effect on young people.

All of us have seen our political landscape now poisoned by mistrust and venomous attacks, and we've seen media, movies, TV, and popular culture plummet in terms of content, values, and with an escalation of irresponsible choices left for the public to scrape and sort through, and all for the love of money, greed, a need to get short-lived attention, and pointless power. What's palatably apparent is the rise in this as common practice, and the rise in our adapting to it as acceptable and normative.

“Drift Away”

Dobie Gray's hit song “Drift Away,” written by Mentor Williams, is like a listener's thank you letter to musicians. We need a healthy meal of rejuvenating art in our social diets. When you see a dancer, poet, or singer, hug them. I think we need a new song to sing again today. Very recently

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I came to see this art-culture-history-philosophy as quintessentially important work. The reason why it's critically important is because when a young teacher or student reads, learns about Bessie Smith or Woody Guthrie, they will see "music meaning" in a different way, that might inspire that young person to create the next songs, traditions that are based on "that kind of music" not this vapid and selfish, self-glorifying, titillating puff stuff that drives the market today. Those kinds of new song are the kinds of songs or innovative art/ideas that move people and change the world. That inner view is what we will try and check in from, as we journey through some history of music expression.

Roaming through the jungle, the jungle of "oohs and ahs," searching for a more agreeable noise, I live a life of primitivity, with the mind of a child and an unquenchable thirst for the sharps and flats. The more consonant, the more appetizing, delectable they are. Cacophony is hard to swallow. Living in a cave, I am almost a hermit, but there is a difference, for I have a mistress. Lovers have come and gone, but only my mistress stays. She is beautiful and gentle. She waits on me hand and foot. She is a swinger. She has grace. To hear her speak, you can't believe your ears. She is ten thousand years old. She is as modern as tomorrow, a brand new woman every day and as endless as time mathematics. Living with her is a labyrinth of ramifications.

I look forward to her every gesture. Music is my mistress and she plays second fiddle to no one.

—Duke Ellington, *Music Is My Mistress*

Duke Ellington's own relationship to music itself, how he sees her, lives in and with her, how he follows her every gesture, speaks powerfully to that inner dynamic, connection artists have with art. It seems so mysterious to observers at times, but for the artist that connect is sacred and about the essential being-ness. It is what an artist does in the world, how we breathe.

Today, young people are very dependent and relate directly to this medium of expression, music. So the more informed the music is, the better chances we have for not only connecting with younger people but also informing their cultural habits and values. So the cultural aesthetics, language, words like identity, human narrative, "aspirational charges," revolutionary ideals, all are paramount for implementing new living, culture order. This is why music is so important in our social-cultural history.

Actually, for over twenty-five years straight with no break (one sabbatical in 2014 last year) this is all I have been teaching. I gather all my information—well, most—on societal norms and cultural phenomenology by squeezing popular culture this way. So what can this tell us, as one way to value a healthy arts vision, diet in contemporary society? Music, good music, that speaks about the human condition is necessary.

The study of music in the area of popular culture, post 1955, is an exploration of popular culture shifts focused largely on a newly empowered (transistor radio, dance, TV) youth generation of teens, and young artists who bring a greater infusion of ideas, culture (clothes, ideologies) politics, social activism, and issues into “voice.” Here, we take a deeper look, listen and walk into this artistry, times, and the meanings. For the first time in American history, musicians and what they said, their beliefs, were thought to be ideas and music of great social, cultural, intellectual, and artistic value.

New Questions about Music post 1950

1. What did the music mean now? How was music culture used to voice the new ideas of the time? How did the music address the issues, what did it say, symbolize?
2. What needed to be said, what are the significant themes, what were the major social issues at hand?
3. What effect did the music/movements have? What significance did the production of music have for the culture? Musicians? Society, citizens? How was power redirected? What was the critique?
4. Who were the major artists who were prominent? What did the musicians actually say, their focus, intent was?
5. What were the song titles? What are the lyric lines, hooks that speak to the cultural concerns? What topical, stylistic linkages can be made today?

“Aspirational Charges”

In 1969 *Billboard* magazine revamped its categories and instituted soul as the overall category for Black popular music. As musicologist Portia

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Maultsby pointed out, “The Soul era was a productive period for Black Americans. Group cohesion, political activism and community self-help programs were responses to the messages of soul singers and leaders of the Black Power movement. The music created by Blacks and for Blacks during this era communicated a general philosophy of refusal to accept the undesirable and a determination to create a better future.”

“Soul music,” particularly between 1965 and 1975, again represented many things, but soul music can be thought of as the Black popular music that accompanied the civil rights years in America.

“A Change Is Gonna Come” (Sam Cooke/Otis Redding, 1965)

“Say It Loud I’m Black and I’m Proud” (James Brown, 1967)

“Respect” (Aretha Franklin, 1967)

“Choice of Colors” (Impressions, 1969)

“To Be Young Gifted and Black” (Nina Simone, 1969)

“Ain’t No Stopping Us Now” (McFadden and Whitehead, 1979)

Bob Marley, a central figure in the global rise of the Jamaican music, reggae, was moved by the social-political infused music he experienced coming out of 1960s Black urban social protest-soul. He should be counted in as “global soul.” The period of the 1960s, ’70s, ’80s, early 1990s is the golden period of relevance.

These are some of the themes that are prevalent and consistent with the values of the times which are transmitted in Black popular culture: social protest, community (love), political activism, social accountability, self and cultural pride, family/love, and Black Power/Black Nationality innovative artistry, international recognition and appreciation, and the power of a relevant social dynamic.

Ornette Coleman’s radical idea about a “free jazz,” 1950, was a major move among musicians articulating a concept in popular culture about the value of ideas which tracked with other formidable aesthetic concepts which too helped to usher in the civil rights social protest era. And you can line up these “aesthetic cultural solidarity positions” across all kinds of style territories and disciplines. You see it and read this in Gertrude Stein and Picasso. Again, in Ornette, free jazz, and Jackson Pollock. You can see this in the Beatniks, Ginsberg, Kerouac. Then moving onto the post-Beatniks of the ’60s, the Soul Movements, Haight-Ashbury, Woodstock, punk to

hip-hop, in the work art of Andy Warhol and Jean Michel Basquiat. One Haight-Ashbury movement connected group called the Diggers believed in something they called the “free frames of reference,” which related to food, services, forms of creative expression. Literally, figuratively, musically, socially, these movements were connected. Music was the carrier of the message, and the musicians in most cases were carrying out that charge. Community of sound, messages, performance/listening practices.

The styles/aesthetic of the time cut across generation in style, and commitment to “music-ing,” all infused into their music, a popular purpose directed at changing the world in some way. The musicianship was striving for high standards and innovation, freshness, variety.

Artists have, as I said, an “aesthetic social solidarity.” They tend to wear their ideas in a song.

As I was preparing for my final exams this past semester with my wonderful students, it occurred to me, one cultural shift that helps me to understand, perhaps, some of the reasons for our reoccurring generational difference is indifference to history. Information, clippings on Duke Ellington or Miles or Sarah Vaughan, cultural news items, were collected by someone and stored someplace, it was a special place, in a collection area that you could be escorted in to see and study. Growing up in Detroit, we had a world-class music arts collection in the downtown public library, called the Azalia Hackley room.

Oh, Detroit, yes, a great city. I know, I was there in the '60s and '70s. We had a guy there, Mayor Coleman Young, he was tough. But he represented a progressive charge. Motown was the music.

Anyway, Azalia Hackley had been one of those top of the 20th century—that is, 20th-century race women. She prided herself in the advance of the race, and her life work reflected this. So upon her death her collections were donated and this reading room was named in her honor. It was special, and we valued not only the information, but we got excited to see the pictures, read the stories, take notes, then share what we had found. We were studying what it meant to be a musician. It was the exploration that we valued. It was the library, and we could also check out books and we read, then we returned, that special source, books. We felt we had something. Today information is available, it's everywhere, it's common, it's not valuable, it's not as special because it's a commodity. You don't even have to buy it—actually, in most cases it's

free. That's why certain things (history, life accomplishments of artists, larger culture) are not valued as "special." That "special feeling" today has to be generated from a wider array of stuff, or stuffing. And the special feeling lasts only a millisecond because the only thing we value today is the next best fastest thing you can buy right now. But, there are other factors involved megaculturally which are a part of the good stuff of this story too.

I am finding that the entire creative music industry has become a distracted dash to sample, copy and paste, retweet, and download. Instead of finding creative original human-grown solutions to our natural evolution, everybody is in a race to engage the "next new since last week" electronic entertainment info box operating system. As an artist, you must resist.

The industry heads who control, deal and steal, really don't know or care about the music, but we do. So, there is among a large number of us a revolution of aesthetic and production independence. It has in recording been called the "indy movement." But today with the supportive drive of hands-on Internet technology, we get to hear today, Internet radio, streaming, YouTube, original, fresh, and all-access music which has completely revolutionized the way we get our music. We have seen this blossom within just the last 10 years, and this is a remarkable moment.

I think there must be an intergenerational share that bridges that "old library, value the newspaper clippings way," and the new "Internet electronics posts way," and links this aesthetic generational divide with that creative threading we spoke about that values human creative expression and helps to ground artists' experiences, their lived conditions, in ways that continually model and mirror how we all respond and live in the world.

Identity and Raising Revolutionary Ideas

Freedom is the most pervasive, seductive, transformative, peopled agency idea next to love we have in human experience. It as well is the most aesthetically charged process in all of art. In all areas of the creative endeavor, freedom reigns the highest in terms of creative ideals, even as this relates to execution of form. Music and arts are about freedom. This idea transcends every period, generation, style, and very special challenges we have that arts are asked to address. Freedom, then, is a revolutionary idea because it allows the mind to see possibilities, changes, new ways of

seeing, and new ideals for demanding codes for how people want to live in the world. People have always sung new ideals through music. You say, "So what, we have already heard this." But, I think it may be well a way to see tiny revolutions in our own human and personal relations.

I've always believed, as utopian and as idealistic as it may sound, that if our arts, songs were more productive in modeling a vibrant world order, our society would be clearly on its dreamed-upon values of what it aspired to be. Amiri Baraka asks, "What do the people want, what do they value?" He would argue in his 1984 *Autobiography* that "the music itself, rapid motion during this period, put John Coltrane into a music so expressive, thrilling, people tuned in to him the reaching, certain dimension, where the people themselves were going they are the harbingers, reflectors of the same life development."

This last theme helps us to frame how to view and value contemporary impulses. Grunge, and hip-hop are two ideas, music aesthetic movement periods, that are still in play. A conceptual view of this is, they are popular culture movements and have icons that represent and give us a deeper and better relational view into the times we are living.

You ever wonder, feel, what are these young people thinking about? Just listen deeply for a close read of the music. All the codes are there. The slang, the swag, the world view, the complaint, the aspirations, the cultural rubs, the triumphs, the testimonials, the tragedies, and the potential keys to changing the world. It's all there in the music. But you have to do the archeology. You have to look at the dolls, the tools, the clothes, the bones left behind by the culture that had been living there to find the treasure to understanding and valuing the human dramas lived out.

Conclusions

So what I am saying and why. I just want to give peace a try. I just believe in the piano man. I just want us again to sing a song, celebrate, have a holiday. "I'm just trying to change the world, one sequin at a time."

So says contemporary singer, provocateur, Lady Gaga, who has become this generation's pop rock rah-rah queen. It's as if Gaga was saying, "I'm doing my work by a different measurement, a sequin, and one of those a day, and that different way is my social consciousness." That doesn't spin any different than Dylan's "Times They Are A-Changin'" or

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the Fugues asking, “How many mics do we rip on the daily? Me without a mic is like a beat without a snare.” Seems the messages still come, but the symbols have just shifted, yet the songs still ring with things that have meaning and are relevant. These ideas are not happenstance. These ideas are discussed among creative and industry-involved people. These things are not random or lightweight; they carry significance. Popular culture is no fluff-ball enterprise, it is cognitive construction, and an endeavor that has huge implications for how we define the very fabric of our society and how it stands up, or will fail, fall.

Too, the landscape is different today, and who constructs and shapes that? Hollywood and market drawers paint a constructed highway to our commercial dependency and destiny, one commercial at a time, but digested hundreds of times a day in multiple ways to millions every minute. So it’s difficult, but we must fight for the higher ground. Thanks, Stevie Wonder. It is this sensitivity to the song/art in our times, shared by artists that I hope allow us to continue to listen clearly, and reflect deeper, our humanness.

In this way, the culture carriers, and the social system we all participate within, in this mix comes closer to singing in touch with our important human codes, of values, love, connectedness, hearing each other, and living in our world to contribute to its powerful and positive dynamics and changes. That’s the song I hope we can hear and turn the volume up on.



How we see and hear today.

NOTICE!

STOP

Help Save The Youth of America
DON'T BUY NEGRO RECORDS

(If you don't want to serve negroes in your place of business, then do not have negro records on your juke box or listen to negro records on the radio.)

The screaming, idiotic words, and savage music of these records are undermining the morals of our white youth in America.

Call the advertisers of the radio stations that play this type of music and complain to them!

Don't Let Your Children Buy, or Listen
To These Negro Records

For additional copies of this circular, write
CITIZENS' COUNCIL OF GREATER NEW ORLEANS, INC.
509 Delta Building New Orleans, Louisiana 70112

Permission is granted to re-print this circular

Stop! Don't Buy Negro Records.



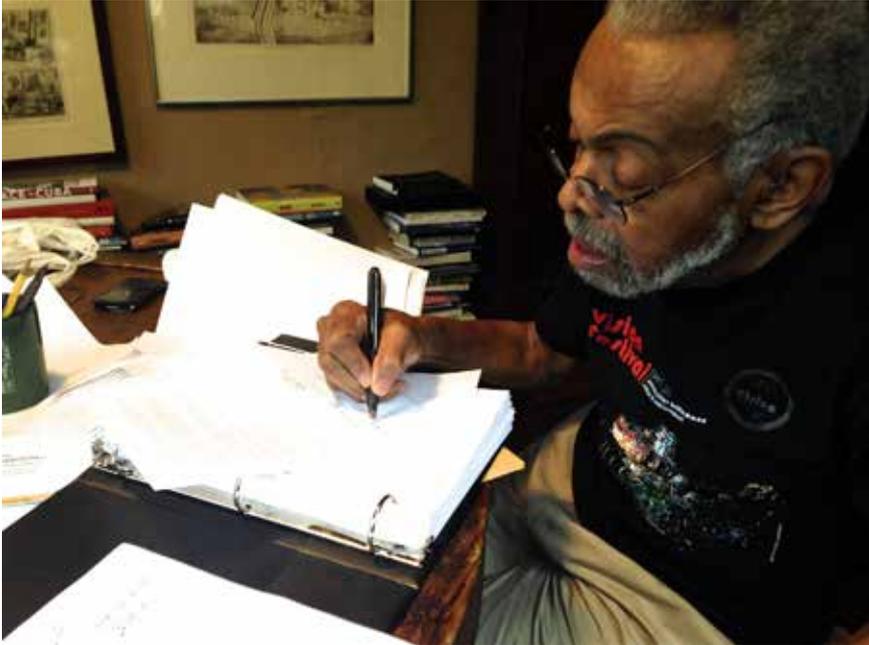
Our future standing tall.



Modern jazz artist Christian Scott.



Cover artist Daniel Callahan.



Author's mentor Amiri Baraka at his home in fall 2013.



Drummer in a subway.



Bill Banfield's Jazz Urbane.



Author with Turahn Dorsey, campaigning for Boston mayoral candidate John Barros.

POSTLUDE

Afterthought on Ethnomusicologizing

Music is a principal carrier of community value, agency, and identity which shapes and nurtures our spiritual streams. Music is more than music, it's a measure and a matter of life(ing). Your music/arts really become something, when they match the amount of living you have done. Then its formula is complete. Music is tones organized to tell human stories.

However, for many of us a problem exists today as people find it difficult to distinguish between what's popular and what's poisonous, and that money drives every cultural popular convention. Since money drives most popular industry and media, there is a saturation of sugar-coated poison that is fed to the public as normative, good for you, and of value.

The media cultural prescription is clear: from reality TV shows, venomous partisan politics, to a terror-teased news landscape, our spiritual nerves are unraveled. This affects everything including how parents are blindly compelled to oblige, how people invest in programs that are aligned to corporate status quo formulas, and most dangerous, how young people are coming to see themselves shaped and molded into very narrow identities and value codes.

The very, very good news is that the gene pool for talent, excellence, and the ability to move the world with music has not gone away.

Today's young musicians and artists and this generation in general have so many tools, talent, and energy at their disposal.

Today's young musicians are so much more flexible and adaptable to numerous landscapes. They have multi-diverse and technological skills that allow a different kind of rationale for what is of value. And the capacity for ears and understanding is actually greater, because the band width for what you can take in, and deal with on the table, is wider, so the table

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is even wider. And today, young people's worlds are wider at a glimpse and at a touch. That's a very powerful position to be in . . . if they know what to do with it, and why.

The market seduction of music has gotten even deeper. Everyone still loves music and entertainment, and they ingest and choose to purchase it at a greater intensity and spend more money to have it, all their way.

So I think it is a matter of having more connections and conversations consciously with the artists, the people, and the industry that disseminate all this creative loving matter.

For the training of musicians, you have to show that musical relevance is transferable and that artistry is threadable tissue weaved through history. You have been shown the mapping of great artistry, by example. Those young artists who see that, generally will get back to absorbing those great examples and processing that into their own aesthetic to be delivered their ways in their own time.

The problem that exists is that we have to dismantle the thick walls of industry and corporate controllers who have near zero interest in the values of humanities, art, and culture.

The new paradigm is old school actually. It's reaching back regaining older substance values of relevance, resource, and reverence. It's being in touch with the impulses and needs of the time you live in looking forward, creating expressions and understanding them as such. This will be the work of the new paradigms in education, industry navigation, and conscious creative works that again look to bring our worlds together.

There are today so many "levers of our identity and needs" that the marketplace players are manipulating and pulling. It's clear now that I have moved to a space in my disdain of corporate controllers of anything. It's perhaps because of my maturing and a need for clarity, independence, and putting your foot down, and picking up the pen. You get past the point of wanting to play the games being played, or being in somebody else's game, and wanting to plan your win game plan. That's not rebellion, or being disaffected, or being an old crusty curmudgeon. I do think a revolution of sorts, a rising up is inevitable of a group of thinking artists who together forge the new paths unaffected by market trends. In some ways with technology that is actually happening. To believe music/arts can alter and affect the thinking and actions in the world, communities we live in, as an artist, educator, a creative thinker,

you see so many examples of pro-active creative work that changed people's lives.

That's why so many people do this. But that art, song, that creative dreamscape, as I have come to know them, were beautiful, powerful, and compelling, and contained meaning. The expressions were well-crafted, top notch. I have lived through periods where I have seen music, culture, and arts create positive attitudes being considered on the top tier. And I have seen changes both in terms of the intentionality of things and the devastating reality and effect on young people, as creative work in the popular marketplace has moved to lower tiers.

All of us have seen our political landscapes now poisoned by mistrust and venomous attacks, and we've seen media, movies, TV, and popular culture plummet in terms of content and values, leaving an escalation of irresponsible choices for the public to scrape and sort through, and all for the love of money, greed, and pointless power.

The world, our society is slipping further to slippery messes: Trevon Martin's senseless shooting/ Zimmerman acquittal, Boston bombing, the lack of common civility, racism, greed, the continued devaluation of women, insidious industries, corporate control, young people "entitled and in chaos and search." . . .

* * *

Young artists are supposed to be doing it, bringing it, their way.

Those of us in arts and humanities are equally accountable to the society slips, and we have a tremendous job to provide direction and training of young people today to be contributors and caretakers of the world they must participate in fully. We have seriously lost that sense of community. We really have to be critical and more consciously visible and vocal. I have become perhaps possessed by this calling to explore the meanings in music culture and the lives of music makers and as well to take a deeper look into the activity that shapes and accompanies people's lives in culture.

The Richard Wright 1937 dictum, to be "a purposeful agent has a serious responsibility. Called upon to do no less than create values by which to struggle, live and die . . . create the myths and symbols that inspire a faith in life . . . found upon those materials and experiences which will create a meaningful picture of the world today to wonder out of what materials can a human world be built," looms large for us.

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In doing this, again, I have come to see this art culture history-philosophy sharing, as quintessentially important work. Because of engagement, dedication, and fueled by great visions, this inspires the art ideas with mission.

One pivotal question today is: how do we qualify an experience in the public sphere? How do you value it, and what does it mean? How does the experience connect the people? And what does that connection give you, commerce or community?

In other words, cultural relevance. Does the thing have big lights and is it fast? Is its meaning determined by what I get out of it, and is there in that value a cost factor for what it means to me now? And yes money is being made through a community of on-lookers. But, does anyone here know how to take the time to think about how and why all this affected their life in the real? The old horse has to recon with the electric buggy, and it's challenging. Cultural relevance in this way is about relating too. We are in 2015 at a crossroads where there is an ongoing paradigm, values shift, and the fast and furious forward is winning the argument of relevance for sure. What this sharing has as well allowed I hope, is to journey toward, to extend, transport my exchanges with some of today's artists and make visible these narratives of positive, creative agency, process, to hear their "the inner-story." Ethnomusicologizing encourages artists to talk about the meaning of their work, inside the biting and inspiring issues that drive our culture today.

Also I wanted in our share to extend advocacy of great art expression, and a discussion about what that means today. There are few critical broad-based arts books of note. Fewer even broad-based music culture criticism, which is informed and dynamic, because they are usually limited only to certain reads of music culture. Popular music criticism is "too careful," by that I mean there are few willing to courageously take on youth culture and issues and yet show love.

Also, if we take on youth culture, what goes with that is the producing epicenter of it, Hollywood pop culture.

The value base and examples that far too many Hollywood executives, then following suit, "young hero artists" are putting forth are whacked!

I wanted to take this head on. And further in music, there is not enough broader based discussion across disciplines and genres from blues to classical to hip-hop to jazz. I would like to raise the profile/voice of

critical discourse on many more arts styles in culture. I wanted “Ethno” to be an all-encompassing arts and culture book outlook.

What are the values at stake in such a tug of war? I think a loving fight and discussion is a good one to have. Care-full dialogue about what our hearts care for, artists, people, and creative expressions.

These issues are important: the new expressive paradigms, digital age design and apparatus, identity, pop culture, the way in which the youth narrative is being drawn. In the '90s, I watched hip-hop, new jack swing, pushing to get heard to get a piece of the pie; now in terms of entertainment, they own the pie and the bake shop. This concerns me. The cultural shake up or down is troubling, and yet inviting and inspiring overall and all at once.

The reasons I have tried to share here is, that from my view, when a young teacher or student reads about Bessie Smith, Woody Guthrie, or John Coltrane, they see “music meaning” in different ways. That inspires the next songs.

That kind of new song or innovative art idea moves people and changes the world. As Margaret Mead reminded us, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Scholarship is about broad-minded thinking, exposure but making choices about your choices, dedication, and passions. Scholarship and artistry must be focused on illumination and lifting people into relatable, sustainable, and usable facts, information, culture, and history.

How we can live more humanely and contribute has got to be our goal in sharing, education, and art. To that end, I believe in this direction, which I called here ethnomusicologizing, and it probably can’t be achieved all in one place, one book, one discussion; it has to be a balanced long pace engagement with people, and sharing.

You have to live somewhere and care. Our civic, social, politics, community concern is important. Artistry is armed for engagement, as it counts for many things. As the dancer and community activist Wyatt Jackson who I filmed said, “There is an intersection with what the arts can do and what the people do with the art. I think you have to be clear about how powerful music and dance, poetry is. Then, once you realize how powerful that is, you have to make a choice. . . . So, what ya gonna do?” Our communities are places where people live and where we must

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bring artistic engagement. I believe above all the other aspects of our creative sharing, that's where and how we become most relevant, our "human sounding in the world" and our belief in the ideas that we all have to make music into experiences of "living music." I'm interested in the visibility of the humanities, expression, stories, artist ideas that sustain the soul and uplift the human narrative in ways that inform and challenge, change, broaden our ideas and thinking, and therefore our living. I want to have a stake in that line of communication because it reaches. So we come to another question: what's going on in our world today, with arts, what does music do, mean in our culture? I think in the game there have always been at least three players: artists, the folks, and the industry (recording, sales, technology, media). I think artists want to reach the people. The people want the music, expressions, the songs, the things they desire to listen to, look at, and feel. The industry is interested in making money and controlling the creative stream. The industry can only keep its lights on if people consume what they want, due to what the industry feeds them and makes available.

And so this is the three-partner dance that's been going on since the first records were made available. Finding the balance as an artist in this three-partner dance is challenging.

Technology today has in many ways replaced, supplanted the traditional role of recording companies, TV programming, and brick and mortar distribution, because of the "hands-on power" of the Internet, website capabilities, and global business reach. If technology can effectively carry the art to the people, its role in this arts and folks dance is our new partner.

The industry still though with its last dying breath is solely consumed with how to satisfy consumption addiction by creating a false notion of people needs, by putting out there more "new stuff." Youth identity becomes a primary focus, carrier of, symbol of "what's in." But really it's just all the same ole stuff re-dressed up. So we cannot look to or be deceived by corporate masquerades and sales agendas for anything really. TV, cars, clothes, it's all stuff that we already have. I'm interested in the journey of our evolving human experiences. That is what our focus of interest should be. The arts thrives on this, revolving around combinations of human experience. And so you get to a point when that is what defines by purpose,

dedication, and passion what it is you want to spend your time doing as an artist.

I can never tire of my good friend's wise words:

(Music) social role as protest, resistance, musical energy, revolutionary aesthetic qualities, social history of rebellion, revolt, musical defiance to . . . challenge, contest co-opted, diluted, eviscerated commercialized forms . . . revolutionary music . . . not just for America, but for the planet . . . a music in which every major innovation . . . has been from musicians to attain greater and greater levels of expressive freedom through liberating the two basic fundamentals of music: time and sound . . . and the African blurring . . . to reach an emotive and *spiritual catharsis* to allow the gods (wisdom) to descend to affirm personal and communal humanity in the face of inhumanity . . .

—Fred Ho, our friend the revolutionary artist

Today, many are feeling that the raising up of more creative spirits, forces, workings in our world, with sustained ideas about making differences that count, is our revelatory, revolutionary, and necessary move. Our conversations and base of operations are to continuously create together the ideas and engagement that generate the oxygen of our creative core, to turn out expressions that matter and move people, and always, always maintain that creative spirit-soul.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“The most important thing we have to do today is to be with each other in community. By having the privilege and joy to be with people, to share ideas in that engaging, loving, critical, and caring place, our lives are enriched and our world is made better.” This quote was taken from *Ethnomusicology* and speaks to what care came my way from people who helped this narrative process. Thank you all so much!!

There have been at least two books that serve as models for what I wanted to achieve here: *Blues People*, by Amiri Baraka, and *Music, Society and Education*, by Christopher Small. Both of these works fired my imagination for how we could in a text address music and how the people in culture reach and connect in artistry. Baraka, a towering figure for us, made Blackness an honor and a privilege of identity in music and art, and that acknowledgment is now an important element and voice in music thought. And Christopher Small reminds us of the importance of the process of living in music not just in the product, and that this work can transform all of society. My friends George Lewis, Guthrie Ramsey, Fred Ho (now in heaven), and Robin Kelley provide essential models, maps from my generation, as contemporary scholars, historians who document our culture in ways that help define these voices, experiences, as critical. I'm indebted to them for the fire they keep on me.

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