

VISION ∞

at Roulette 509 Atlantic Ave Brooklyn, NY

JUNE 12-16
2013



Milford Graves
a Lifetime of
Achievement



On MILFORD GRAVES

We honor Milford Graves for his lifetime of achievements in music and his contribution to the world of human accomplishment and possibility. Both creative and scientific disciplines music is science and true science is based in concepts that can mirror music.

We honor Milford for being one of the most brilliant and unique musicians in history. For his inventions and contributions to the art of modern drumming, the removal of the snares on the snare drum, taking off the heads so the trap set is no longer trapped rather it opens to a world concept of drumming.

Sticks become fingers elbows become mallets - that dampen the skins so the drum can speak in a more open voice. There is melody and rhythm and many forms some mambo, rumba, a montuno's descending pattern... A new montuno, with one foot in science and physics another foot in the Congo or Cuba sometimes called Jamaica, Queens. As all great music, it dances and jumps out at you. It is vibrating and is executed with lightening speed and dexterity. Keeping in touch with the roots of music, it extends from heart to our hearts. We honor Milford Graves, educator, mentor, and healer through sound integrating music with medicinal herbs and intelligence, with curiosity and acupuncture, through martial arts and wisdom. We are honored by his genius unceasing creative in all that he does.

– Parkers



IMPROVISATION FREEDOM REVOLUTION

VISION ∞

TICKETS

\$30/night | \$20/night students & seniors at the door only

\$140 5-night pass

\$270 VIP 5-night pass with preferred seating & gift

\$10 (at door only) JUNE 15 Afternoon Music of the Future @ Roulette

\$5 (at door only) JUNE 16 Panel & Film @ Roulette

ADVANCE TICKETS ONLINE:

<http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/374021>

Acknowledgements

We thank all the artists who come together to share their visions, to be a bright light.

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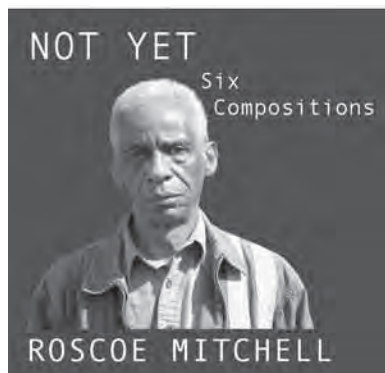
French-American Peace Ensemble and East-West Collective have been made possible through the French-American Jazz Exchange, a joint program of FACE ("French American Cultural Exchange") and Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation, with generous funding from the Cultural Services of the French Embassy, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs de Musique ("SACEM"), Florence Gould Foundation, and Institut Français.



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Mutable Music begins anew in the digital era, by switching to an all-digital format. All new releases, including **downloadable artwork & liner notes**, will be offered in **HD & mp3 formats**, as well as CDRs.

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A monumental recording of recent concert works by Roscoe Mitchell, for solo percussion, alto saxophone & piano, string quartet, alto saxophone quartet, baritone & chamber orchestra.

Also Available: *Spectrum* - Muhal Richard Abrams, Roscoe Mitchell, *Solo [3]* - Roscoe Mitchell, *Kirili et les Nymphéas* - Buckner, Mitchell, Bourdellon, Khatir, *Space* - Thomas Buckner, Roscoe Mitchell, Gerald Oshita



REVOLUTIONARY ENSEMBLE: COUNTERPARTS

Documents the last live performance by the legendary Revolutionary Ensemble - Leroy Jenkins (violin); Sirone (bass); Jerome Cooper (drums, balaphone, chirimia, Yamaha PSR 1500) - Genoa, Italy. November 25, 2005.

Also Available: *The Art of Improvisation* - Leroy Jenkins & Driftwood, *Alone, Together, Apart* - Jerome Cooper, Thomas Buckner, *A Magical Approach* - Jerome Cooper, *The Psyche* - Revolutionary Ensemble - *In Concert: From There to Here* - Jerome Cooper, *Beyond the Boundary of Time* - Revolutionary Ensemble

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Visual Art

Main stage: projections by Jeff Schlanger; film of Robert Janz at work by Travis Brown
Art that changes - on the walls: Robert Janz
Live action painting: Jeff Schlanger
Photography: Ziga Koritnik, Luciano Rossetti

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On ROBERT JANZ

Janz as in dance. Robert is the monkey. Robert is the joker. Robert is the ninja. Robert is always in the present.

Like an invisible hand, he passes, and something appears. On the street, his vast canvas. Deer in Soho, a mountain on Broadway, the bison are still here. If you're there at the time.



He is weather,
he passes second by second, day by day, the
mountain changes.
We don't see Robert, we see the mountain. We
see the deer. Robert is the deer.
Look and he's gone.

When I first met Robert, I met a stick.
I moved across a performance space. A
stick appeared, balanced on end, waiting
for me. Who put that there? I moved slowly,
moments tick, moment stick, moments
tick, moments stick. Bang! The stick fell.
Everything changed. Moving among the
performers, with his quiver of sticks, over and
over, Robert changed everything.

Walking through woods, I saw 6 sticks, leaning parallel against the trees. In the corridor I saw six sticks, fanned in the corner. In the studio, I saw 6 sticks, stacked, seemingly innocent. Innocent for real, light on the earth, and yet changing everything. Robert's mischief keeps imagination present. It is always moments, and waits to be found. And then changes. And we change.

Robert Janz lives everywhere. Cadaqués (Spain), New York, Berlin, Dublin, Baltimore, London San Francisco, Belfast, Chicago, Paris, he has moved through, touching each lightly. Painter with water on rock, poet of six words, art in the mail, a hand opening through 3 drawings, a grin like sunlight.

Being invisible is expensive. In a Paris park, the chairs move each night, squares, spirals, a Janz dance, people dance it by sitting, adapting each day. Do they notice? In the galleries, other artists' objects are precious, because hidden, and put the artist

on the stock market, more visible than the art. But on the street and on the shore, Janz doesn't make objects – like a musician, he makes time. This art clings in the memory just because it is precious, and will be gone. It is an indelible politics of interaction with the world, a wrestle against erasure, a conversation with everyone, a stubborn life, an art of sanity with crazy laughter. But still, in his 80s, Robert works with, not against. He survives, one with the changes, decade after decade, he pops up, like a good weed.

Robert Janz has been one of the most important artists in my life, in the lives of all those who were his students, in the lives of other artists, in the lives of the casual encounters, down to the last momentary "Did I see...?" or "Is that...?" – the best questions to ask of visual art. Or of philosophy.



On Grand and Wooster. "Post no bills.
Post only bulls." Post no bull.

– Fiona Templeton

Robert Janz is the wizard of the ephemeral. His aesthetic is that of the Native American: To pass through the landscape without leaving a trace - as fish through the water or birds through the air.

Sculpture as stream of consciousness - kinetic flux - a celebration of change itself. Change itself is the wizard. A celebration of Robert Janz.

– Anthony Howell





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IMPROVISATION FREEDOM REVOLUTION

VISION∞

Improvisation is neither religion, nor ideology. Improvisation is not about holding back nor dominating, It is accepting and playing from our human essence. Freedom cannot evolve within existing constraints internal / external, so, collective revolution is born - to transform by powerfully shaking what surrounds us. — *Didier Petit*

shape shifters

what is there in shifting space
but shape shifters
within the walls of bright colored canvas
emerging from the belly of civilization
the way the colors take shape
reshape
shift within themselves to form bodies
fragile solid anvils
one note transcribed by others
so it would never change
but ever changing
it's not like we disappear as shapes do
we are here to unwash the whitewash
& reveal what things look like underneath
what the shifting song relays
to all parts of existence
what's written & what's thought
that cannot be washed away
but lay open like a
door a book a wound for all to see
because renewing depends on us
new switches less hitches
did you ever think you'd be a part of it>
freedom/ vision/ a blessing for the children/ a quilt of liberation
the earth / like good improvisation/free/ as in individual SOUND
as in free yourself & the revolution will begin/evolve
as in change the way you think/feel/give > BE(lieve)/sing: peacefully
as in remember where you are/ that we are one/here/together
freedom is: improvisation/revolution/music/words/dance/art/LIFE

— *Steve Dalachinsky*

The conduit-improvisation—
Goes through the brutal barrier
Oppression, repression—
Gives us its negation— The only
solution
Freedom— The only revolution
Releases the resolution
Of the age-old contradiction
Between the expression
Of the inspired individual
And the group's benefaction
In continuous ovation
Becoming one
Humanity -The beauty of art
Is its vindication—
In the fire, the forge of
Truth - celebration

— *Connie Crothers*

CELEBRATE MILFORD GRAVES — A LIFE-TIME OF ACHIEVEMENT

Afro Cuban Roots**7:30**

Milford Graves	drums/perc
David Virelles	piano
Román Díaz	perc/vocals
Dezron Douglas	bass
Román Filiú	alto

This group depicts Milford Graves' pre-avant garde involvement in African and Afro Cuban music. The Tono-Rhythmology portrays the evolving African-Afro Cuban music landscape in its collaboration with pre/post bebop Jazz

**Milford Graves Transition TRIO****8:30**

Milford Graves	drums/perc
D.D. Jackson	piano
Kidd Jordan	tenor

This trio will streamline the post African-Afro Cuban music transition of Milford Graves into the Free Jazz era. The settings of this trio will be in the spirit of the Milford Graves/Don Pullen duo of the late 1960's.

Milford Graves NY HeArt Ensemble**9:30**

Milford Graves	drums/perc
Charles Gayle	tenor
William Parker	bass
Roswell Rudd	trombone
Amiri Baraka	poetry

A composite of three members of the original NY Art Quartet: Graves, Rudd, Baraka, joining the exemplary duo of Gayle and Parker. "The Power of the Word/Sound" will be the defining statement of this group.

CELEBRATE VISUAL ARTIST ROBERT JANZ
FILM AND PHOTOS OF THE ARTIST AT WORK BY TRAVIS BROWN**Bejewelled Dreaming Florentina**

Terry Jenoure	violin
Maria Mitchell	dance

7:00

Maria Mitchell and Terry Jenoure are Bejewelled. They shape a rich improvisation based on Jenoure's poem "Dreaming Florentina," and enriched by twenty-five years of performance and teaching collaborations.

Roy Campbell's Akhenaten Ensemble

Roy Campbell	trumpet
Bryan Carrott	vibes
Jason Kao Hwang	violin
Hilliard Greene	bass
Michael Wimberly	drums

7:45

The Akhenaten Ensemble reflects Roy Campbell's deeply felt connection to Egypt. This is the first performance that will feature Jason Kao Hwang on violin. The band will premiere Campbell's new compositions "Walking to the Pyramids" and "Valley of the Kings and Queens."

Rob Brown U_L Project

Joe McPhee	trumpet/sax
Rob Brown	alto
Miya Masaoka	koto
Mark Helias	bass
Qasim Naqvi	drums

9:00

These musicians came together for the first time at the U_L benefit. Their different backgrounds and generations produced an electrifying synergy. As an improvising group they operate w/out an obvious leader. Built on generous mutual respect they lead and accompany at different times never overpowering each other. They eagerly await this in depth exploration of the fresh and unknown in a new, shared moment.

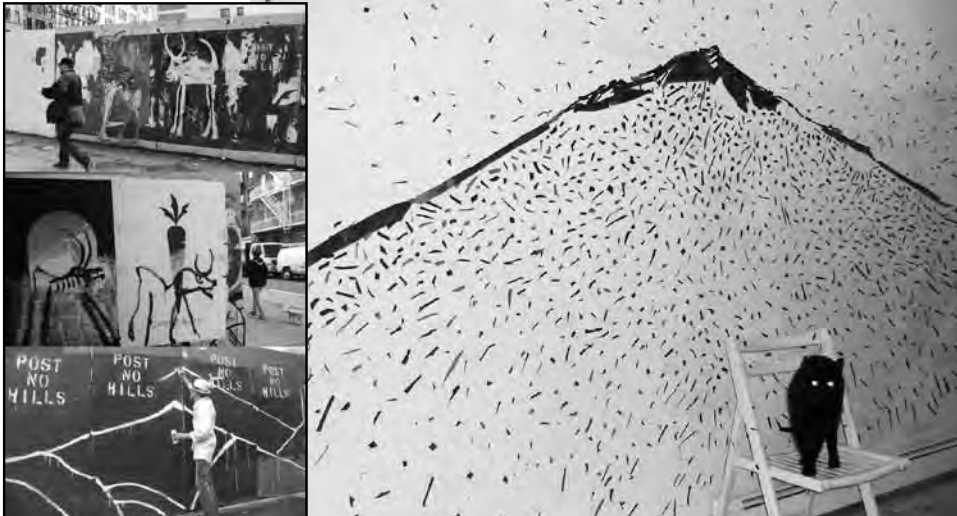
CELEBRATING VISUAL ARTIST ROBERT JANZ
 FILM AND PHOTOS OF THE ARTIST AT WORK BY TRAVIS BROWN

Roscoe Mitchell Trio**10:00**

Roscoe Mitchell reeds
 Henry Grimes bass
 Tani Tabbal drums



because it's / this / dim was commissioned in 1987 by The Conimicut Foundation to compose a series of three works for baritone vocalist Thomas Buckner and pianist Joseph Kubera. e.e. cummings poetry provided me with the freedom I imagined. "dim" was premiered in 1988 at The University of Wisconsin. "this" and "because it's" premiered at the Madison Civic Center on August 20, 1989. tonight we will perform "because it's" and "this." The voice part for "because it's" will be played on the Baroque Flute and the voice part for "this" will be played on the Bass Recorder. **A Cactus and A Rose** was inspired by my gardens here in California and "CARDS" is a scored improvisation

Special Lifetime Achievement in the Visual Arts: Robert Janz

My focus is on the archaic, image making at the origins of humanity and art. The imagery I draw on comes from the earliest art, from the childhood of humanity. Contact with the deepest Past expands our understanding of our inheritance and its potential.

— Robert Janz

A FRENCH AMERICAN CONNECTION

Steve Dalachinsky
 Connie Crothers

VOCAL-EASE

poetry
 piano

7:00

A 30 minute interplay where languages meet and sound is produced and overlap creating a complete empathetic unit of ONE.

THE DEAD ARE NOT REALLY DEAD
 THE AIR FULL WITH THEIR BREATHING
 THEIR SIGHS THEIR JOYS & SORROWS -
 THEIR AIR

— Steve Dalachinsky

Bern Nix Quartet

Bern Nix guitar
 Francois Grillot bass
 Matt Lavelle trumpet
 Reggie Sylvester drums

7:30

The Quartet references the past. It delineates the present and foreshadows the future in original compositions performed by the quartet. Melody, rhythm, harmony are merged to create a sonic experience greater than the sum of its parts. The work comes out of the powerful yet somewhat hermetic notion of harmolodics.

all negative capability needs
 is a good post-modern rhythm
 section-worthy of dealing
 with manifold aspects of TIME
 and swing

— Bern Nix

A FRENCH AMERICAN CONNECTION

East-West Collective

8:45

Didier Petit	cello
Sylvain Kassap	clarinets
Xu Fengxia	guzheng
Larry Ochs	tenor
Miya Masaoka	koto



This quintet of musicians from France, China and USA perform music that retains the integrity of each player's sound and musical background in a collective sound-world that mixes improvised music with the traditional sounds and tendencies of Eastern music. Utilizing various tones and textures with modes and linear musical structures, they merge the sensibilities of two distinct cultures.

The French-American Peace Ensemble

10:00

Francois Tusques	piano
Louis Sclavis	clarinets
Kidd Jordan	tenor
William Parker	bass
Hamid Drake	drums



The two Frenchmen have never played together. They speak little English and the Americans less French, the common language being music. We come together to perform collective improvisations and newly written compositions, bringing our individual musical aesthetics together to create new living musical works that bind us as musicians and humans. FAPE comes at a time when it is crucial for people of different cultures to come together with their differences intact so that individuality becomes the binding factor in our concept of unity.

Where Improvisation and Culture Come Together

Five years ago **Arts for Art** began meeting with educators to encourage Improvisation-based music as part of curriculum and to address access to complex music in underserved communities. This program is now called **coT.I.M.E.** (community of Teachers of Improvised Musical Excellence). Teachers discuss their findings and ideas for new curricula to build a future of innovators and improvisers from a broad population and help new generations find their unique voice.



THE FUTURE

Achievement First M.S. Band
Gene Baker director

2:00

York College Creative Ens/CUNY
Tom Zlabinger – Director

2:30

Brooklyn Young Improvisers
Jeff Lederer, Jessica Jones

3:00

All schools (50 young musicians)
William Parker, Dir., Hamid Drake guest

3:30

French American PANEL

5:00

French and American musicians of different generations and influences will shed some light on how this transatlantic cultural exchange shaped their music as well as their social and political ideals, and on the many ways this conversation continues to amplify and resonate. Moderator: Michel Dorbont

Panelists: Didier Petit, Francois Tusques / William Parker, Larry Ochs

Tomas Fujiwara & The Hook Up

Tomas Fujiwara	drums
Michael Formanek	bass
Mary Halvorson	guitar
Brian Settles	tenor
Jonathan Finlayson	trumpet

7:30



Tomas Fujiwara & The Hook Up will perform new compositions from their upcoming album, to be released in 2014. Tomas Fujiwara & The Hook Up's, *Actionspeak* (482 Music), was called "insightful, invigorating, hard to put a finger on...music with a history, smartly informed and firmly moored" by *The New York Times*, and "head-turning...postbop elegance...propulsive groove and subtle abstraction" by *Time Out New York*.

FUTURE PRESENT

Davis/Revis/Cyrille

8:45

Kris Davis piano
Eric Revis bass
Andrew Cyrille drums

Revis/Davis/Cyrille brings together three generations of jazz. Deeply explorative, yet never losing sight of the whole. This evening they will present a full length, in the moment composition that has not yet been named nor has it yet been imagined. The three musicians have been described to collectively deliver "an extraordinarily sensitive set...free jazz without any of the chest-thumping catharsis...but with real narrative intrigue."

**Simmons / Burrell Duo**

9:45

Sonny Simmons alto
Dave Burrell piano



"The first generation after Ornette, Coltrane and Ayler, Dave Burrell and Sonny Simmons have built their unique revolutionary music. They work in the jazz tradition: free within the law, expanding the language while never severing their roots. A keen explorer of Monk, Ellington, opera and new music, Dave Burrell reintroduced the ragtime into the free jazz era; Sonny Simmons, a bluesman at heart, turned his attention towards the East at Coltrane's urge... It's a wonder they had never worked together. The Vision Festival gives you a chance to see two powerful masters join forces."

Reggie Workman WORKz

12:30

Reggie Workman bass
Marilyn Crispell piano
Odean Pope tenor
Tapan Modak tablas
Pheeroan akLaff drums

A unique melding of stellar musicians, definitive innovators in a spectrum of genres. (Classical, World, Jazz and beyond) Exploring, expanding, creating new musical DNA out of their unique lineages. They will perform Reggie Workman compositions: Synapse II, Was' 9, Summit Conference, Cycle III and Ode to Brother Yusef.


Decolonizing the Music PANEL
Reclaiming the Power of Creative Music in Communities of Color

2:00

By the mid '60s, the jazz avant-garde had become one of the foremost revolutionary modes of cultural nationalist expression in the Black Arts movement. In the decade that followed, artists drew upon the New Black Music's ethos of self-determination as they founded jazz lofts across downtown New York City. While the music continued to flourish, artists began to notice the decreasing engagement with audiences of color particularly beginning in the mid 70's as more generally all forms of 'protest music' were losing ground. By the early 80's this 'revolutionary' music could barely find a place to be heard in the urban areas that had originally fostered it.

Black February FILM

4:00

Butch Morris Documentary by Vipal Monga

Legendary jazz composer, conductor, Lawrence "Butch" Morris, is profiled in *Black February*, the first documentary feature by director Vipal Monga. The film chronicles the concerts that celebrated Morris' 20th anniversary of Conduction, his revolutionary technique for live music-making. More than a simple portrait, *Black February* is a film about the creative process and the scope of a musical theory that redefined what it means to make music.

**Inner City: Migration**

Miriam Parker dance/choreography
Jason Jordan dance
Hamid Drake drums
Jo Wood Brown art
Robert Janz art

6:00

Inner City Projects is a collaborative work. Parker choreographs in terms of flow patterns through the audience. Wood-Brown's floating cubes of translucent light form an active visual body that link Janz's images of bison to the movement of dancer and audience below. Hamid Drake's drum sets up a cadence between the real and the imaginary.

Positive Knowledge

Oluyemi Thomas bass clarinet/sax
Ijeoma Thomas voice/words
Henry Grimes bass/violin
Michael Wimberly drums

4:00

Honor and gratitude unto the interior of the TONE WORLD. Positive Knowledge will be embarking on a collective / individual journey, telling the tales of self-transformation and celebrating it with humanity. Indeed we will accompany each other every moment of the way. Ijeoma, Henry, Michael and Oluyemi.



Bluiett's Bio-Electric Ensemble

7:30

Hamiet Bluiett	baritone
DD. Jackson	piano
Harrison Bankhead	bass
Hamid Drake	drums

The Music comes from a quiet dedication to the organic impulse towards creation. It is about healing, both oneself and those who can feel/hear the vibrations and keep themselves in tune. It is based in a belief that art has this power and we do. Tonight with all compositions, both written and spontaneous we will seek to create harmony with the universe.



Mario Pavone ARC Trio Music

7:30

Mario Pavone	bass
Craig Taborn	piano
Gerald Cleaver	drums

Here is new music, specific to these players and to the deep history and the forward thrust of the propulsive piano trio within our musical tradition.



Marshall Allen & McBrides BASS ROOTS

7:30

Christian McBride	bass
Lee Smith	bass
Howard Cooper	bass
Marshall Allen	alto

Crossing bridges back and forth between generations, breaking down Jazz distinctions / keeping the lines of communications OPEN. In this way we learn, young from elders and the elders who never become old because they are still listening still playing still growing. They share amongst each other and with the listener, the music that is an expression of life itself.



AFA Programs

Arts For Art is committed to providing access to un-compromised creative jazz music and multi-disciplinary art by diverse artists. To that end, AFA has developed major programming initiatives that significantly advance its mission to strengthen the presence of innovative art in community.

THE VISION FESTIVAL (18 years)

- An intensive gathering of artists and audiences from around the world. AFA celebrates Lifetime Achievements by legends in the field, brings together the work of multiple generations and provides for unique collaborations which expand the artforms.
- AFA invites music educators who participate in AFA's **coTIME** to bring their students to perform original music at the festival.
- The festival includes panels that bring attention to important social issues.

EVOLVING SERIES (10 years)

AFA's platform for artists of all generations to present work that explores a range of creative possibilities. We are committed to building content and context for the art we present. While we focus on the new, we honor great artists who are no longer with us, because our history makes us stronger.

AUTUMN: IN GARDEN SERIES (5 years)

AFA takes a direct approach to bringing creative art to communities. Free shows take place in community gardens, making innovative art a neighborhood event.

EDUCATION/OUTREACH PROGRAM (6 years)

- AFA continues to develop **Community Teaching Improvised Music Effectively (coTIME)** by bringing together music teachers to develop new music curriculum for our schools.
- AFA's after-school music ed program, **Music Is Mine** began with workshops in 2010. This expanding program makes complex music available to children in low-income housing.

ARTS & ADVOCACY (17 Years)

Since the first Vision Festival AFA has maintained a commitment to support social justice and the artist. We hold **Town Hall Meetings / Panel discussions / Salons** where artists network and address the political, and practical concerns of being an artist in our society.



Improvisation an endless conversation equal rights self-determination revolution the main trend! — AB

Music is a love beast

A sky dragon

A snake

If you put your ear close

You will hear

Something

— Joe McPhee

Improve / Action

Improvisation

ImproVision

Air in motion

R/evolution

— Sylvain Kassap

In this culture where you are required

to play the same changes

in the same way as everybody else if

you want to succeed—

anyone who wants to truly improvise

has to seize the freedom

to say what you want to say in the way

you want to say it,

and if you do that—you are automatically

a part of The Revolution!

— David Budbill

2 Kinds of Hope

1. like false promises taking you down the rosy path - filled with vodka bars travel logs and dope, tv - down to the reservation that was designed just for you and yours - to keep you - safe from all that Stuff they don't want you to get - any of - the good stuff like what they've been - holding back - for your own good - of course
2. then -there is the other kind of hope that comes after a long hard winter like spring's buds - pushing their way on to old tired dried out looking trees making them feel and look all young again till they do the improbable and the world becomes new and we can see - again - that who we are is beautiful and powerful and filled with Spirit ... we improvise a revolution because we are free

— Patricia Nicholson Parker



WITHOUT YOU WE CAN DO NOTHING

For 18 years, Arts for Art has presented the successful world-class Vision Festival as well as other less visible but equally important initiatives. It is a labor of love to keep this powerful music alive & visible. Yet, A.F.A. is struggling with a staff too small to effectively move forward.

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- Vision Festival 19
- A group of younger artists to carry the Vision forward...
- Move THE UNDER_LINE forward with special Salon multi-arts performances that will build bridges within the music and arts communities and make it available to a younger audience
- Begin to implement "Grow It Local" to bring music & art directly to the community
- Continue our education initiatives to make sure that this complex music is available to a new generation

I believe that this is a struggle that we share. Together we can build that Larger community - without which Arts for Art will be unable to continue to make Visions Real.

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Visit: www.artsforart.org/contribute
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Thank You!

— Patricia Nicholson Parker

Milford Graves Speaks

Interview by William Parker

There's like a storyline that's bein' told, man. It's goin' back into Afro American traditional music that was developed by people during the time of slavery and people that was coming out of slavery, people who were breathing out their emotions through their voice. That's what that music was really about. People were breathing. And that goes back even further, if you want to go into the whole concept of African music. Relative to my research, they don't have an equivalent word in African traditional language for "music". There's no word such as "music." Your music is your experiences in life. So you speak this stuff out. You don't speak in a monotonic way, you know what I mean? You sing your stuff out, man. But you can get sidetracked when come into a conservatory setting, where people put you in a box and mold you. So for economic reasons we do these things to survive, but from a true biological level, you have a contradiction there. People talk about playing cosmic music, music of nature, well; you can't do it by using conservatory material. It's a contradiction. It doesn't work.

The roles of musicians are very powerful. Humans have a multitude of mechanical receptors; these different receptors can detect frequencies from all over the planet.

Musician's job; we are receptors of the vibration of the planet. We're supposed to vibrate with that and come out with that stuff, and not say, "Well, this is an A-note and it's based on the twelfth root of two," or this here or something. Most of the music has fallen into this bag in that it me graphically written on a piece of paper. It doesn't work like that as far as nature is concerned. At the present time, vibrations on the planet are rapidly changing. The planet is starting' to send out some stuff that is making' us vibrate like mad!

Interview by Ken Weiss

Spontaneously improvised music is the most difficult type of music to do for a band. It's much more difficult than written music. We're trying to take you to another kind of level. Let's talk about the history of free-jazz. If people would look at free-jazz in a non-technical or intellectual way, looking past that they are not playing the right notes, or they're not playing the right beat, they're out of time and all that, that's the most superficial way. But free-jazz didn't develop like that. Free-jazz developed with a lot of people who where not that academically astute in playing the music. They didn't have conservatory training. Now some people say 'isn't that bad?' I say no, that's excellent. They came out of nowhere, the only thing they came with was a divine will to want to be able to play music. Some of the guys were criticized because they couldn't read music but I said 'Good, that's new creation.' The major thing that they had over the guy with conservatory training is that they wanted to do it.

You also have to understand that free-jazz developed at a very critical time in this country. They were on this planet when there were some historical changes being made in this country and this world and the theme all over the world was freedom! We want freedom, we want independence. We don't want to follow the same rules because those rules didn't work for us. It was a time for change in human rights, civil rights, political rights and everything else. These people were supposed to be free just like the poetry was, the dance was, the painting was. So when you listen to this music, don't just listen for a note because it has nothing to do with that. I don't know if people understand the real initial movement that was involved in creating this type of music. When we got togethe with Ayler, there was no talking about tunes, we just played, man, and people don't know that. The guys who made this music were part of a change in America, and it was a great change. Everybody wanted liberation and when it comes, it's not an intellectual liberation. This is real time survival liberation and the people did it with conviction.

Photos: Ken Weiss



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'Remember the Dead and Fight Like Hell for the Living' Cultural Politics of Memory and Improvised Poetics of Protest at the Vision Festival

by Scott Currie

By any standard, the Vision Festival has clearly made history: if nothing else, its eighteen consecutive years of improvised music, dance, poetry, and visual arts presentations every spring have established it as standard bearer for the jazz avant-garde in the United States, and earned it a place alongside creative music's most illustrious and enduring international forums (FMP, Moers, Nickelsdorf, Tampere, Victoriaville, and Guelph come to mind). However, the true measure of the festival's historical significance lies not merely in its impressive longevity, but also, and perhaps most importantly, in the sustained aesthetic engagement with the legacies of the past and exigencies of the present that has defined its core identity and, indeed, its activist mission. In calling attention to an artistic movement written out of dominant historical narratives, the festival has gone beyond setting the record straight, by further demonstrating the transformative power of collaborative improvisation in mobilizing creative communities.

The festival's own historical roots and political spirit can be found in New York City's loft-jazz scene of the 1970s, where creative musicians, denied professional opportunities and press recognition, staged performances in their own living and rehearsal spaces. From this empowering ethos of self-determination there soon

emerged a network of artist-run venues stretch-ing across downtown Manhattan—from dilapidated storefronts and tenements on the Lower East Side to abandoned factories and warehouses in the nearby Cast Iron district (now better known as SoHo)—that helped transform blighted urban neighborhoods into vital breeding grounds for cutting-edge art. Here, the loft-jazz avant-garde made

its enduring contribution to the development of the music, and passed on its traditions to a new generation through open sessions, rehearsal bands, and informal professional mentorship.



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As a young bassist starting out right around this time, William Parker followed a professional trajectory that took him on daily tours of the downtown loft-jazz scene, tracing out song-lines through its musically defined urban geography, following an itinerary centered on such seminal jazz lofts as Studio Rivbea and Studio WE, as well as numerous shorter-lived and lesser-known spaces. In fact, Parker met his wife-to-be—dancer/choreographer and future Vision Festival founder Patricia Nicholson Parker—while playing with saxophonist Jemeel Moondoc's Ensemble Muntu at Studio Rivbea in December 1973. By the early 1980s, as the combined forces of gentrification and conservatism brought an end to the loft era, William had already seized opportunities to organize festivals at East Village lofts and clubs, and formed a pivotal partnership with Patricia and German bassist Peter Kowald, with whom he subsequently staged the 1984 and 1988 Sound Unity Festivals. The international impact of these two seminal events catalyzed the coalescence of a new post-loft creative-music scene, helping to foster a renewed sense of community conscious-

ness among improvisers, which found expression first in a series of Lower East Side Music Festivals during this period, and not long thereafter in Patricia's founding of the Improvisers Collective in 1993. Although organized without external funding support, these latter initiatives brought together a grass-roots coalition of local artists around a shared vision of creative community empowerment that would give rise to a self-sufficient festival on the grand scale and ambitious scope of Sound Unity.

Quite understandably, then, given the rich legacy of socio-aesthetic activism to which it was heir, the future-oriented Vision (for the 21st Century) Festival that Patricia organized in the wake of the Improvisers Collective embraced its history, drawing from it not just inspiration, but even more critically a galvanizing sense of purpose. Faced with the dominance of a neo-traditionalist jazz establishment that had emphatically written the loft movement out of its official histories, and with the rise of a trendy new downtown scene that was branding a few Sound Unity veterans as the cutting-edge of the

present—while effectively marginalizing many of their erstwhile loft-scene compatriots—the Vision festival gave new voice to a community of artists all but silenced by a hegemonic pre-internet media-scape that publically denied their history, and gave them a chance to reclaim it through bold concerted action. Clearly grasping the premise of George Orwell's warning, "who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past," Patricia's team of artist-organizers conceived the festival as an improvisational intervention to disrupt the existing consensus of an exclusionary culture industry, in an effort to leverage modest (and hard-won) commercial success into long-overdue critical recognition and empowering media visibility.

Having been fortunate enough to serve with this visionary team in the festival's early years, I should probably note that it wasn't easy: having to contend with George Wein's powerful JVC festival up-town, along with Michael Dorf's high-profile (and also corporate-sponsored) Knitting Factory festivals on our home turf, threw any number of obstacles in our path, which we had to turn into opportunities in order to survive. As I recall, the festival's tradition of Memorial Day artist tributes began when Dorf moved his festival from mid-late June—where he had competed unsuccessfully with Wein's festival the previous year—to early June, where it would have competed directly with our program. Thus forced to schedule our festival a week earlier, over a three-day weekend that traditionally sent New Yorkers off to the beaches from Coney Island to the Hamptons, we decided to give our audience a good rea-



son to celebrate the holiday on the Lower East Side, with a memorial concert honoring one of the great unsung heroes of the loft scene: saxophonist-composer Jimmy Lyons. The surprising success of what had begun as a desperate gambit set a precedent for years to come, as the Vision festival paid annual homage to a litany of trailblazing artists including Denis Charles, Julius Hemphill, Frank Wright, Don Cherry, Jeanne Lee, Peter Kowald, and Wilber Morris.

Upon reaching its tenth anniversary (and reclaiming its original June programming schedule), the Vision Festival instituted an annual lifetime recognition program in place of the Memorial Day tributes, to celebrate the achievements of inspirational leaders still active on the contemporary scene, and thereby demonstrate the continuing power of avant-garde's illustrious past to shape the present and evoke the future. Although the festival continued to stage occasional tribute concerts to mark the untimely passing of influential loft

icons—including Leroy Jenkins, Sirone, Rashied Ali, Marion Brown, and Billy Bang—its new focus reflected an ever-deepening commitment to the age-old activist principle: “remember the dead, and fight like hell for the living.” Honorees to date have already included such pioneering figures as Fred Anderson, Sam Rivers, Bill Dixon, Kidd Jordan, Marshall Allen, Muhal Richard Abrams, Peter Brotzmann, and Joe McPhee; this year’s festival will extend the proud tradition still further by presenting a Lifetime of Achievement award to percussionist-improviser Milford Graves.

Alongside its honorary interventions into the cultural politics of memory, the Vision Festival has also participated in the making of history through the improvised poetics of protest that have defined its engagement with the activist causes of its day. From its very first year, the Vision festival has showcased a unique and transformative collaborative conception, uniting improvising musicians with dancers, painters, and poets, to explore extemporaneous modes of expression that cross the prevailing conventional boundaries and often challenge hegemonic political ideologies. Within a few years, this engaged interdisciplinary aesthetic was manifesting itself

explicitly in the dedication of the sixth festival to “A Vision Against Violence.” Subsequent festivals have carried this newly inaugurated tradition forward with mobilizing themes including “AvantJazz for Peace,” “Vision for a Just World,” “The Revolution Continues,” “The Creative Option,” “Take a Stand,” and “This Time Freedom.” In view of the globally polarizing events that gave it impetus, the first of these dedicatory themes merits particular attention.

Global events in the weeks, months, and years leading up to the eighth festival’s climax on Memorial Day weekend of

2003 presented Patricia and the artists on the Vision scene with a formidable and provocative set of challenges, which they engaged head-on with a characteristic zeal. Not only had the downtown arts recession following the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center finally and seriously impacted the budget of their non-profit collective—forcing them to scale the festival back from sixteen days to six—but also the dominant political climate of hawkish neo-conservatism stemming from 9/11, and leading to the war in Iraq, had effectively marginalized the subaltern oppositional voices of the collective’s

committed pacifist members, who had organized its last two festivals around the theme “A Vision Against Violence.”

The 2003 Vision festival took place during the relatively brief “honeymoon” period after the U.S. military captured Baghdad and before the loyalist resistance forces regrouped into a deadly and deeply entrenched insurgency. Coming on the heels of a correspondingly rapid and seemingly conclusive military victory in Afghanistan, the end of “major combat operations” in Iraq, announced by President George W. Bush in his “Mission Accomplished” speech, appeared to leave relatively little discursive space in the public sphere of mainstream media culture for critical contestation or reasoned debate by antiwar activists. The bombing of the U.N. headquarters, which marked a decisive shift into an ever-worsening wave of violent bloodletting—that reached a dreadful nadir with the bombing of the Golden Mosque and would not begin to abate until after the 2007 Sunni Awakening—was still months away, and the missing weapons of mass destruction—which had provided the original rationale for military action—would not become a poorly considered American presidential joke for almost a year.

Nonetheless, a widespread, deeply felt sense of moral outrage and revulsion at the televised horrors of war impelled artists on the Vision scene to stage collaborative improvisational interventions in which they deployed all the aesthetic

weapons of mass instruction at their disposal. These interventions actually began very shortly after the onset of hostilities: almost two months before the Vision Festival, Arts for Art staged the weekend mini-festival AvantJazz Against an Iraqi War (4-6 April 2003), at which Nicholson

Parker debuted a work by her new PaNc dance company and Parker reunited his Little Huey Creative Music Orchestra to premiere his World Peace Trilogy. Needless to say, then, by the time the festival arrived, its theme of “AvantJazz for Peace” resonated with a critical mass of its artist and audience constituencies, and, as the footage released on the Vision

Volume 3 CD/DVD set amply documents, festival performances and installations embodying this theme succeeded in amplifying this resonance into powerful expressive statements of protest.

In my research into this festival, I have drawn upon the work of a number of engaged academic theorists to account for the manner in which Visionfest organizers managed to bring the inspirational power of the aesthetic legacy they had long championed to bear upon the political exigencies of antiwar mobilization. In this regard Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble (the Guelph Jazz Festival’s founding Artistic Director) have argued quite persuasively that the characteristic improvisatory practices featured at both the Guelph and Vision Festivals are “less about original acts of individual self-creation ... than about an ongoing process of community building” and, indeed, they have gone so



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far as to assert that improvisation in these traditions is "predicated on the exploration of alternative (and alternative) modes of being in community." In turn, their theoretical perspective on improvised music explicitly builds upon the broader foundational position taken by Christopher Small, who believes music making establishes relationships "not only between those organized sounds which are conventionally thought of as being the stuff of musical meaning but also between the people who are taking part, in whatever capacity, in the performance; and they model, or stand as a metaphor for, ideal relationships as the participants in the performance imagine them to be."

In the context of the Vision Festival, I would argue, the collaborative interplay of avant-garde improvisers on stage frequently serves as a metaphor for alternative and frequently utopian conceptions of social interaction and organization. The festival's ritual frame highlights and reinforces the already potent socio-political connotations of these creative acts on the bandstand through all the media of mobilization orchestrated by the organizers. Dance, music, and poetry performances, along with video, sculpture, paintings, and mixed-media installations, all combine with activist speeches, panel discussions, and progressive pamphlets to consolidate an aesthetic of spontaneous creative self-realization and link it emphatically and enduringly to an ethos of collective community empowerment and commitment to social action.

Ultimately, of course, all of us at this year's Vision Festival can experience for ourselves how well the performances suc-



ceed in harnessing the affective potency of avant-garde improvisational collaboration—rich in socio-politically critical, resistive, and even subversive symbolic resources—to unite and mobilize us in collective reflection and shared commitment around its theme of "Improvisation, Freedom, Revolution." As Patricia has so eloquently reminded us, all we need to do is: "Hear the music. Let dance move us. Let art revolutionize our way of seeing. Be challenged by the creativity all around us.... Do not settle. Do not be undone. Be not limited. Be profoundly uncomfortable with evil.... Let the art which keeps our spirit be woven through the days and nights of our lives."

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