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## **“Always New and Centuries Old”: Jazz, Poetry, and Tradition as Creative Adaptation**

**W**riters concerned with African American literatures and musics have returned over and over to questions about the nature and meaning of “tradition.” Kimberly Benston, Houston Baker, and Henry Louis Gates as well as musicians and music critics like Wynton Marsalis, Keith Jarrett, Albert Murray, and Kevin Whitehead have confronted that concern with different strategies and divergent aims.<sup>1</sup> In some cases tradition, like ritual,<sup>2</sup> has been associated with the timeless and unchanging, viewed either as an Eden to which one must return or a wasteland from which one must escape. In other cases it has been celebrated as a productive and energizing base on top of which one can erect new structures. The former position draws strict boundaries—live with tradition or depart from it—while the latter encourages a more fluid, even nomadic, relationship to tradition—go where you will but remember whence you came. In either case tradition is a strategic, referential invention, a constructed version of the past used as a charter to authorize (or invalidate) present-day cultural and artistic practices.<sup>3</sup>

In the realm of jazz writing, the issue of tradition and its proper understanding is perhaps the trope of tropes. With each seeming artistic revolution (bebop in the 1940s, “free” or “action” jazz in the 1960s, fusion in the 1970s) the debate has been joined anew. Is the new musical style a break from tradition that points toward the future, a logical extension of all that preceded it, or an aesthetic dead end? And, in any event, how are those people confronting the new style to understand its relation to the past? What exactly are contours of “the tradition” emerging from the past? Which outstanding musicians, stylistic nuances, or performance practices allow us to see those contours more clearly?<sup>4</sup> The Marsalis/Murray answer to such

questions centers on the “fundamentals” of blues and swing audible in the work of musicians like Ferdinand “Jelly Roll” Morton, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and John Coltrane. Any music that is a legitimate heir of the tradition emerges from intense study of the music’s masters and their masterworks. One cannot and perhaps need not move any further “forward” until she has thoroughly understood and mastered the music composed and recorded by these figures, their argument goes.<sup>5</sup> While the contrasting vision of Jarrett and Whitehead also focuses our attention on individual musicians, its emphasis is on the degree to which those figures have had a vanguardist outlook. In other words, the tradition, such as it is, is primarily a function of change and innovation.

A particularly compelling meditation on these issues emerges from a 1981 poetry and music collaboration between poet, essayist, and playwright Amiri Baraka, multireed instrumentalist and composer David Murray, and percussionist Steve McCall. The poem that furnishes the title for the collaboration, “In the Tradition,” has been printed with slight alterations several times since it first appeared in the *Greenfield Review* and is, as a result, much better known than the live recording of it on Amiri Baraka’s *New Music—New Poetry*.<sup>6</sup> Many commentators have expressed admiration for the poem, with one describing it as “a masterpiece of political art and a major statement on the interpenetration of culture and politics.”<sup>7</sup> Few, however, have commented on Baraka’s inspiration for the poem, on the recorded and various live performances of it, or the role played by David Murray and Steve McCall as collaborators. Indeed, despite the attention given to African American poetry from the 1960s forward as performed utterance informed by vernacular and popular cultural elements, the recording of this poem and many others has been strangely ignored, with a few notable exceptions to be discussed below. One cannot gain a full understanding of how the recording—both the poem and the music—articulates a vision of tradition, however, without examining what inspired it and how the poet/performer and musicians realized their goals.

On the recording and in printed versions Baraka dedicates the poem to alto saxophonist, composer, and arranger Arthur Blythe and takes the poem’s title and “positive inspiration” from *In the Tradition*, Blythe’s second album for Columbia Records.<sup>8</sup> *In the Tradition* features Blythe, pianist Stanley Cowell, bassist Fred Hopkins, and drummer Steve McCall performing pre-1960s compositions by Fats Waller (“Jitterbug Waltz”), Duke Ellington (“In a Sentimental Mood”), Juan Tizol (“Caravan”), and John Coltrane (“Naima”). Included alongside those examples of music apparently in the tradition are two compositions by Blythe: “Break Tune” and “Hip Dipper.” By titling his recording and selecting material for it as he did, Blythe was perhaps making a statement about what the jazz tradition meant for many performers who, like him, had developed their skills beginning in the late 1960s as participants in what came to be known as New York City’s “loft scene” as well as similar ones in Chicago, St. Louis, and Los Angeles. Along with the loft proprietor/performers Sam Rivers, Rashied Ali and Ornette Coleman, Blythe was celebrated as a performer capable of producing wide-ranging, exploratory music that often fell outside the stylistic parameters that club owners and record executives thought profitable to promote and market. Despite the freedom that loft per-

formances afforded, many musicians found themselves, as the 1970s drew to a close, reexamining musics that had flourished before the 1960s almost as though they were trying to actualize the Art Ensemble of Chicago's credo, "Great Black Music—Ancient to the Future." David Murray and Henry Threadgill, among others, undertook projects during that time that were as much about embracing the past as they were about breaking away from it. With his octet Murray experimented with different forms for improvisation and group interplay, while Threadgill's trio Air recorded a series of avant-gardist versions of classic ragtime themes.<sup>9</sup>

As a descriptor, then, the phrase *in the tradition* became a multivalent signifier. In the simplest sense it denoted the respectful embrace of past musical practices by a number of musicians who were typically regarded as "outside" players. Beyond there, it accrued associations over time that Blythe may not have anticipated:

When Arthur Blythe formed a quartet . . . and began mixing tunes by Ellington, Waller, Monk, and Coltrane in with his originals, he gave a movement—or more precisely, a moment—its name and unintentionally became its figurehead. Any performance that swings or follows a chord sequence or makes an overt reference to the past is now said to be in the tradition. And any performance which doesn't do any of those things isn't.<sup>10</sup>

And while Blythe performed and recorded in a variety of contexts and with differing groups of musicians, he added another layer of signification by using "In the Tradition" to designate the touring ensemble that performed on the recording. For close followers of the jazz scene, then, the late 1970s and early 1980s were a period of time that, like that in the mid-1970s when media attention centered on Anthony Braxton,<sup>11</sup> focused on an unlikely figure as a savior for jazz. Columbia's signing, promotion and marketing of Blythe was partially intended to bring jazz powerfully back into the marketplace. In the end, the label's efforts on Blythe's behalf were less successful than those for Wynton Marsalis. As a result, much 1980s and early 1990s writing has stressed the degree to which Marsalis and a pride of other "young lions" were returning jazz to "the tradition,"<sup>12</sup> though it should be clear that this process was well underway when Marsalis arrived in New York in 1979.

When asked about his turn toward tradition in an interview published in 1980, Blythe stated that his desire to record *In the Tradition* "was not an attempt to be part of any trend, because several players are going back to the tradition, but [came from the sense] that now the feeling would be right for an album like this."<sup>13</sup> His further comments speak to a conception of tradition as a foundation, a malleable source for creativity, rather than as a foil to innovation:

The music on *In the Tradition* is basic and fundamental to so-called jazz. If you don't acknowledge anything of that nature, then what are you doing? . . . I think, too, that this might be a period when a synthesis of what has preceded and more recent concepts is coming into being. Everything that was good, and is good, is cool. And if it is good, then do it! . . . A bit of the pressure to be innovative is off. People don't have to be innovative to

be creative. For a while everybody was trying to be innovative, but everybody isn't. I've always felt that the innovative thing comes about when one does his homework being creative. That's where people get ideas—"Hey, maybe that can go over there instead of where it was." So I think it's going back to a creative situation where everything is possible. You don't have to reject everything that has been dealt with already and go look for the new horizons, because you could be out in the dark where you don't see shit.<sup>14</sup>

Rather than regarding tradition as a set of outdated practices that one must abandon or revere uncritically, he sees it as a developing resource, one still in the process of becoming. The tradition extends into the present and, as the inclusion of his own compositions on the recording indicates, has his own work as the latest addition to it.

As public figures and performers embedded in the late 1970s New York scene, Baraka, Murray, and McCall were certainly aware of the layered meanings attached to the phrase *in the tradition*. They used Blythe's recording, his implicit philosophy, and the feeling he captured in his work as the "positive inspiration" for the two imaginings of tradition on the recorded version of "In the Tradition": one poetic, the other musical. Their "negative inspiration," according to Baraka, was a late 1970s television show called *The White Shadow* whose plotlines centered around a paternalistic but liberal white basketball coach who, like Gabriel Kaplan's character on *Welcome Back, Kotter*, was capable of solving the problems of troubled African American and Chicano youth.

The poetic and musical visions of "In the Tradition" have a complex relationship to one another that is poorly addressed by descriptions of the music as "background" or "accompaniment" or any suggestion that the music "amplifies" the meaning of the poem. A number of terms might be used for the recording in question with "jazz poetry" being the most obvious. That term, however, makes little distinction between poems *about* jazz or jazz musicians, poems *by* jazz musicians, poems that use jazz performance practices as resources, and poems meant *to be read to* jazz.<sup>15</sup> Too often, those writing about jazz poetry restrict themselves to poems in the first three categories and, by neglecting study of music, overlook the ways in which jazz might be an integral component of poetic performance rather than a vaguely articulated influence.<sup>16</sup>

One writer who has tried to make finer distinctions between these understandings of the poetry-jazz nexus is Aldon Nielsen, who, in discussing recordings made by poets like Kenneth Rexroth and Jack Kerouac in the late 1950s, observes that poetry read to jazz often sounds somewhat haphazard:

Too frequently, enamored of the ideal of improvisation, poets simply took to the stage or to the studio to declaim their creations, trusting the spirit of the moment and the musicians' ability to anticipate the text's direction, often sorely trying the sympathy of their audience. . . . The Beat poets'

relationship to the music was . . . contingent. Rexroth and Kerouac certainly knew a lot about musicians and listened with a keen ear to jazz, but they evidenced little clear understanding of how the music was put together, and thus their approach to locating their own lines within the music was generally intuitive. The music was . . . more frequently background (or even distraction) than equal partner in a new genre.<sup>17</sup>

In contrast, jazz/poetry *collaborations* for him tend to be much more deliberate. He singles out Baraka's work on the New York Art Quartet's 1964 debut recording as a watershed moment in the development of the genre.<sup>18</sup> The group, consisting of drummer Milford Graves, alto saxophonist John Tchicai, bassist Lewis Worrell, and trombonist Roswell Rudd, comprised musicians already familiar to Baraka. For Nielsen Baraka's delivery, particularly on Roswell's composition "Sweet V," doesn't possess the fiery energy of his later work but does have a power of its own:

Baraka's work with the New York Art quartet builds its terrifying tensions out of the dissonance between the apocalyptic words of the poem and the almost overly calm fashion in which Baraka reads it. In fact, Baraka's rendition of the poem with the New York Art Quartet is nearly identical to his cool and suspense-filled performance, without music, recorded at an August 1964 Asilomar conference taped by Pacifica Radio.<sup>19</sup>

It is difficult to understand how the similarity between Baraka's performances with and without music supports the notion that his work with the New York Art Quartet constitutes a true collaboration. Difficult, that is, until one understands that by "collaborative" Nielsen means that the musicians knew the poem ahead of time and improvised responses to the calls issued by the poet.<sup>20</sup> The music therefore remains secondary or decorative: it moves beyond being background or distraction only to the degree that it enhances or underscores the meaning of the poetic text.

Something closer to an ideal of collaboration can be found on the 1958 Verve recording *The Weary Blues*, which features Langston Hughes reading his poetry to music composed by Leonard Feather on side 1 and then to music by Charles Mingus on side 2.<sup>21</sup> The differences between the settings are instructive: the Feather-Hughes side presents jazz as atmosphere, as background, almost as mood-setting support for a voiceover. It, like Baraka's work with the New York Art Quartet, seems a clear example of "poetry read to jazz." Feather nearly acknowledges as much in his liner notes for the recording:

Most of the blues-directed material and all the gospel-related poems were assigned to a traditional-style group, for which I wrote a few 12, 16, and 8-bar blues themes or patterns, a couple of gospel-type numbers for *Testament*, and co-ordinated solos by the sidemen. For the second side, Charles Mingus wrote or improvised suitable material, always with a sensitive ear to the content and meaning of Hughes' statements and questions . . . .

Mingus's genius for controlling a group of men was never clearer than on this session, as he set changes of mood, tempo and theme, often quite spontaneously.

The Mingus side, however, does more than respond to Hughes's reading: it demands something of him. Not only does Mingus's music follow the dramatic and narrative contours of Hughes's poetry, it also elicits a more emotive, dynamic reading from Hughes, especially on poems like "Big Ben" where the poet's normally laconic delivery takes on greater tonal nuance in response to the music.

In a sense, then, one might characterize as jazz/poetry collaboration those situations in which both poet and musicians have to make adjustments and in which auditors have to attend to the meaning of the music as well as that of the poetic text. A useful analogy can be made to jazz performance practice without poetry: to the degree that musicians' privilege allowing each member of an ensemble to "bring something to the music," the best performances or recordings result from situations where each performer contributes to the impact of the event. Composers write material that leaves room for other players to improvise within and play with the conventions of jazz performance, bandleaders choose musicians on the basis of their individual sounds and ability to complement and challenge one another musically, and all performers ideally approach their task as one of simultaneous performance, listening, and interaction.<sup>22</sup> The implications for jazz-poetry collaborations couldn't be more clear: the musicians don't provide accompaniment for the poet any more than the poet is merely a "lyricist" adding interest to a musical work.<sup>23</sup> Instead, all involved work toward creating something greater than either musical performance or poetry alone might accomplish.

On the recording the three performing participants had something to bring to the collaboration by virtue of their lives as performers in their respective genres. In a chameleonic career, Baraka, for example, has gone from being a Greenwich Village bohemian poet, to being an antiwhite, antisemitic cultural nationalist, and, more recently, to being a committed Third World Marxist. Along the way, he has produced an interesting and challenging body of work concerned with the relation and responsibility of the poet to his predecessors, contemporaries, and successors.<sup>24</sup> Since the 1960s his poetry has frequently been "written" with oral performance, musical collaboration, and nonprint media such as recordings in mind.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, following the lead of Larry Neal, Baraka adopted a different style of reading in the late 1960s, one indebted to a number of vernacular sources: "street" language, black preaching, scatting, and gospel and rhythm and blues singing.<sup>26</sup> Many commentators on his work, while acknowledging the changes in his delivery as well as that of other black poets, have been content merely to analyze the "jazz influence" in his work and have significantly neglected his collaborative aims. In any event, Baraka brought to the event a wide-ranging understanding of history, literature, politics, and music—all filtered through his then Marxist worldview as well his prior attempts to have standing ensembles (like his Advanced Workers group in the 1970s) with which to *perform* his poetry rather than merely to publish it in textual form.

In his own work David Murray has explored a broad expanse of the black musical landscape. During his childhood he studied piano and alto saxophone and performed in various churches as well as in rhythm and blues groups. He turned to free jazz while attending Pomona College, where he befriended Arthur Blythe and Stanley Crouch (then a drummer and poet) before moving to New York City in the mid-1970s. As he developed as a performer, rather than abandoning any of the styles that were part of his musical education, Murray embraced them all. In writing for and playing in his celebrated Octet and Big Band as well as the World Saxophone Quartet, he has drawn upon all the musics one might describe as "African American": from the "free" improvisations of the 1970s loft scene to "in the tradition" work based on rhythm and blues classics, the work of Duke Ellington, and collaborations with Senegalese drummers and with poets like Harry Lewis.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, he has continued to work with Baraka since recording *New Music—New Poetry*, most recently on a 1996 recording.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, a number of reviews and concert announcements in the *New York Times* indicate that Baraka and Murray (with McCall) collaborated on several projects between 1980 and 1984 including a jazz musical called *Primitive World*.<sup>29</sup>

Likewise, Steve McCall, before his untimely death in 1989, explored terrain at least as expansive as Murray's. In the 1960s he was a member of the Experimental Band, the group that laid the foundation for the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), a musical collective of which McCall was a charter member. In addition, he performed and recorded in a variety of other contexts in the years that followed: with blues musicians in Chicago, with Arthur Prysock, with Anthony Braxton, with tenor saxophonist Dexter Gordon, with Murray's Octet, with Arthur Blythe (on *In the Tradition*), and, most famously, with the collaborative trio Air. The latter group covered the same range of musics as Murray's groups, focusing on updatings of ragtime, march music, rhythm and blues, bop-derived styles, and free, post-1960s styles.<sup>30</sup> Like his two contemporaries, then, McCall had experience in nearly all aspects of vernacular African American music and was admired for his skill, taste, and versatility. Indeed, McCall was a member of three of the major "avant-gutbucket"<sup>31</sup> ensembles performing in the late 1970s: David Murray's Octet, Air, and In the Tradition/the Arthur Blythe Quartet (see table). His wide-ranging affiliations document the degree to which he was perhaps most eminently suited to be the drummer on this recording—for his knowledge of Blythe, his experience playing with Murray, and his immersion in the various musics embraced by Air.

Together, then, Murray and McCall came to the recording of "In the Tradition" with a deep knowledge of one another's performing styles, and, one assumes, Baraka came fully aware of them as well. Baraka's writing in the recording's liner notes make clear that the musical component of this project was conceived as collaborative rather than simply accompanimental: "We wanted the music and the words to extend to each other, be parts of the same expression, different pieces of a whole." The collective work toward that end resulted in a meditation on tradition that moves along two parallel tracks, each reinforcing the same basic point. Though the poet and the musicians have divergent strategies for presenting their

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<i>David Murray Octet</i>	<i>Air</i>	<i>Arthur Blythe Quartet</i>	<i>In the Tradition</i>
Murray, ts, bcl			Murray, ts, bcl
Henry Threadgill, as, bfl	Henry Threadgill, as, fl		
		Arthur Blythe, as	
Olu Dara, tpt			
Butch Morris, cornet			
George Lewis, trb			
Anthony Davis, p			
		Stanley Cowell, p	
	Fred Hopkins, b	Fred Hopkins, b	
Wilbur Morris, b			
Steve McCall, d	Steve McCall, d	Steve McCall, d	Steve McCall, d

Note: as = alto saxophone; b = bass; bcl = bass clarinet; bfl = bass flute; d = drums; fl = flute; p = piano; ts = tenor saxophone; trb = trombone; tpt = trumpet.

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visions of tradition, those visions are in the end mutually complementary and more powerful by virtue of their being combined.

An insightful analysis of the poem by William J. Harris identifies “naming” as one of the critical components of Baraka’s poetic strategy:

Baraka . . . drew on the tradition of naming that, in this country, has had its exemplars in Walt Whitman and Allen Ginsberg. While Baraka has always named, he never before so completely used naming as the main poetic device of a poem. As if it is a magic formula, he names the people in *his* tradition to counter those in the *other*.<sup>32</sup>

In the course of the performance, as if to answer the question “What is this tradition Based on[?],”<sup>33</sup> Baraka names historical figures, musicians, writers, sculptors, painters, songs and musical styles as both positive and negative examples of the tradition he seeks to describe and celebrate:

Tradition  
of Douglass  
of David Walker  
Garnett  
Turner  
Tubman  
of ragers yeh

ragers  
 (of Kings, & Counts, & Dukes  
 of Satchelmouths & SunRa's  
 of Bessies & Billies & Sassys  
 & Mas  
 Musical screaming  
 Niggers  
 yeh  
 tradition  
 of Brown Welles  
 & Brown Sterling  
 & Brown Clifford  
 of H Rap & H Box (200-1)

In using naming as a strategy, Baraka also calls into question the nature of American music and American literature: what are their relations to European music and literature? To Anglo-American music and literature?

where's yr american music  
 gwashington won the war  
 where's yr american culture southernagrarians  
 academic aryans  
 penwarrens & wilburs  
 say something american if you dare  
 if you  
 can  
 where's yr american  
 music  
 Nigger music?

(Like englishmen talking about *great* britain stop with tongues  
 lapped on their cravats you put the irish on em. Say shit  
 man, you mean irish irish Literature . . . when they say about  
 they  
 you say nay you mean irish irish literature you mean, for the  
 last century you mean, when you scream say nay, you mean  
 yeats,  
 synge, shaw, wilde, joyce, ocasey, beckett, them is, nay, them is  
 irish, they's irish, irish as the ira)

you mean nigger music? don't hide in europe—"oh that's  
 classical!"  
 come to this country  
 nigger music?

you better go up in appalachia  
and get some mountain some coal mining  
songs, you better go down south in our land  
& talk to the angloamerican national minority  
they can fetch up a song or two, country & western  
could save you from looking like saps before the world (206–7)

Throughout the recording Baraka's delivery makes the names he intones and recites even more powerful. In addition to naming the exemplars of his tradition, he embodies certain aspects of that tradition by drawing on black vernacular language, especially the techniques and resources of ecstatic black preaching. His tone at the beginning is almost conversational, like that of a preacher introducing his/her topic and scriptural basis for a sermon. Also like a preacher, Baraka utilizes other voices and other characters (his repetitions of "Hey coah-ch!" in the first section of the poem are one instance) to make his chosen examples more clear and lively. As he moves through his reading, he continues in the preacherly vein, gradually raising the level of loudness and intensity of his words, breaking up and worrying his lines, occasionally singing recognizable songs (e.g., "C.C. Rider") or improvising scatted lines that work much better in recitation than they do on the printed page. Moreover, his repetitions of the word *tradition*, like those drawn from a key biblical verse, continually accumulate power, for all the names he mentions in tandem with his repetitions make that tradition something one can feel:

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in the tradition thank you arthur for playing & saying  
reminding us how deep how old how black how sweet how  
we is and bees  
when we remember  
when we are our memory as the projection  
of what it is evolving  
in struggle  
in passion and pain  
we become our sweet black  
selves

once again,  
in the tradition  
in the african american  
tradition  
open us  
yet bind us  
let all that is positive  
find  
us

(208–9)

At several points, lest his "sermon" reach its climactic point too soon, Baraka pulls back from a high level of intensity to begin again conversationally (e.g., after the words "elegant as skywriting" on page 201 or his first scatted lines on page 202). Indeed, it is difficult not to imagine Baraka (pictured on the album cover holding a microphone) moving animatedly about the stage adding meaning to his words and their sound with his gestures.

While the strategy of "naming" may not seem readily transferable to the realm of music making, there is a sense in which the tradition constructed by Murray and McCall is also predicated on that strategy. The music they play and improvise here "names" foundational styles and practices that one might use to construct an African American musical tradition. It is significant that Baraka (205) refers to Ellington's *Black, Brown, and Beige* in the poem, for what the musicians perform is a condensed version of African American musical history with similar contours to those in Ellington's work (which names work songs, spirituals and blues, among other styles, as part of African American musical history).<sup>34</sup> Over the nearly fourteen-minute span of "In the Tradition," Murray and McCall play—in order—a work song, "Amazing Grace," a slow, bluesy shuffle, a 1920s-style small group jazz piece, Count Basie's riff-based "One O'Clock Jump," Charlie Parker's "Now's the Time," a section with Afro-Latin rhythms (nicely keyed to Baraka's naming of the Puerto Rican styles *bomba* and *plena*), and a free-bop workout on Murray's composition "The Fast Life."<sup>35</sup> They handle the transitions from piece to piece in different ways: the work song begins with an anacrusis from Murray and ends with an emphatic snare drum hit from McCall, for example, while the slow shuffle section begins with McCall's insistent snare drum (synchronized with the last word of the line "I thought I heard Buddy Bolden say," 201). In other words, the musicians take turns asserting leadership with regard to their portion of the collaboration.

Similarly, they share authority for the performance's pacing with Baraka. The beginnings of some of their tunes coincide with major sections in the poem, but not all of them do. A close examination of the recording makes it difficult to support the contention that the musicians are merely accompanying Baraka, particularly when changes in musical style seem to take precedence over the structure of the poem. A reading of the printed poem would not necessarily suggest, for example, that there should be any break between the lines "like the Art Ensemble" and "like Miles's Venus DeMilo" (205), since they are the second and third items in a series. But Baraka stops after the word *Ensemble* when Murray and McCall are coming to the end of a chorus of "One O'Clock Jump." Murray punctuates the poet's silence with the remnants of a riff from that tune and then moves with McCall into "Now's the Time." Only in the third bar of the Parker tune does Baraka finish the series and continue his recitation.

While all three performers rely on naming strategies, they use them in different ways. The aspects of tradition named by Murray and McCall are presented in a linear, chronological fashion, while those presented by Baraka are more "improvisational," less tied to chronology than to his moment to moment concern with naming the figures of his tradition. Because of its ordering, one might be tempted

to read a narrative of progress into the musical presentation, for it starts with what many assume to be the first manifestations of music making by Africans on the North American continent and moves chronologically forward. Such a reading, however, would be misguided for at least three reasons. One, Murray and McCall make no attempts to play idiomatically in each of the styles. Rather than presenting a history lesson, they are picking and choosing elements from that history, and are, like Baraka, commenting on them musically. Approximately eight minutes and forty seconds into the recording, after they have played the melody of “Now’s the Time” twice, Murray and McCall start to move away from performing the tune the way Parker’s late 1940s quintet or other bebop musicians might have. Beginning with the third solo chorus, they play in a way that has more affinities with the kinds of performances they themselves might have done in nightclub or on record, independent of Baraka or a narrative program. Just as Baraka has been gradually raising the level of intensity throughout his recitation and then pulling back, Murray and McCall here deploy specifically musical intensification strategies. Murray’s pitch choices, for example, grow increasingly distant from the harmonies implied by a twelve-bar blues in F. Likewise, McCall’s drum fills have the effect of obscuring the form more than reinforcing our understanding of it. Indeed, in the sixth solo chorus it becomes nearly impossible to discern the contours of the blues form or to know whether Murray and McCall are still following it.

Two, the musicians make no attempt to be comprehensive or all-inclusive in their survey, for we hear no hardbop, soul, or funk in their parade of African American musical styles. As is the case with Baraka (or anyone else constructing a tradition), they are selective. One might say that, rather than tell us the entire history of African American music in all its particulars, they give us a series of snapshots that powerfully suggest that history’s shape. And three, they, like Baraka, have no difficulty playing with the details of the history they invoke or its relation to their conception of tradition. In the climactic section that closes the performance, where they play Murray’s “Fast Life” (beginning approximately at the eleven-minute mark), they make clear they consider themselves to be the latest manifestation of the tradition whose elements they are naming—a gesture that recalls Blythe’s strategy on *In the Tradition*. In other words, they present a view of tradition as something still in process, a process of which they are part and in which they participate. Baraka’s naming of himself at various points in his presentation functions in the same way: “in the tradition of all of us in the positive aspect / cut zora neale & me & and a buncha other folks in half. My brothers and sisters in the tradition” (205). The same can be said of his invocation of Murray’s work with the World Saxophone Quartet at the beginning of this climactic portion of the recording (207).

In the end, Baraka’s question “What is this tradition Based on[?]” receives multiple answers. On one hand, with his words and his delivery he responds by naming the exemplars of his tradition as well as paying homage to some of the ways in which they have communicated that tradition verbally, musically and politically. On the other, Murray and McCall answer by “naming” the styles and embodying the practices of the musics in their tradition. Both answers, one improvisation-

al and the other linear, are mutually reinforcing, partially because they draw on a much larger notion of tradition than either letters or music making might indicate: Baraka's performance style emerges in part from the residue of the African American past contained in musical performance, while the work of Murray and McCall emerges from their own work with musics inspired by African American vernacular speech and spirituality.

In either case, tradition represents for all of them less a closed canon than it does an energizing, inspirational base: a series of exemplars, foundational figures, and sustaining practices. While it may have (uncomfortable) contacts with them, "the tradition" is not based on the aesthetic principles of elite European cultures, on "classical" music, or strict imitation of one's forbears. It is instead the kind of synthesis that Blythe saw as characteristic of the 1980s when he made *In the Tradition*: one that drew lovingly from the past and used it to chart a course into the future. For all of them tradition—"always new and centuries old" (209)—has to be seen as a process, an act of struggle and creative adaptation. If the two visions of tradition on this recording authorize or validate anything, they draw our attention to the collective power of different people and musical styles brought into an open, collaborative space. They constitute a reading of the past that escapes the confines of seeing tradition as static or compelling relentless innovation in favor of seeing it as an opening of the way: to both the past and the future.

## NOTES

1. Baker, *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*; Benston, "Ellison, Baraka, and the Faces of Tradition"; Crouch, "Wynton Marsalis: 1987"; Elie, "An Interview with Wynton Marsalis"; Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*; Jarrett, "Categories Aplenty"; Murray, *The Omni-Americans and Stomping the Blues*; Whitehead, "Death to 'the Avant Garde,'" "Jazz Rebels," and "Off Minor."
2. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*; Kelly and Kaplan, "History, Structure, and Ritual"; Smith, *To Take Place*.
3. Appadurai, "The Past as a Scarce Resource"; Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*; Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*.
4. For very different examinations of these questions, see DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, pp. 1–29; Jost, *Free Jazz*, pp. 8–16; and Watrous, "A Jazz Generation and the Miles Davis Curse."
5. For a lengthy exploration of the Marsalis/Murray position, see Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?* pp. 287–384.
6. *New Music—New Poetry* (LP, India Navigation IN 1048, 1981) was recorded at Soundscape, a performance space established by Verna Gillis located at 500 W. 52d Street. The recording has long been out of print, and now that India Navigation has ceased operation it is unclear whether the recording will ever be distributed again. The label was founded by Bob Cummins in 1972. He spent the majority of the 1970s and 1980s recording musicians, both avant-garde and mainstream, who were frequently ignored by major labels or larger, better-distributed independent labels. As a serious fan of the music, Cummins dedicated himself to recording the musicians he liked and getting their music out to the public. See Ben Ratliff, "Bob Cummins, 68." Both Arthur Blythe and David Murray made their first recordings as leaders for India Navigation. The label

effectively ceased operation in the spring of 2001, less than a year after Cummins's death.

7. Smith, "Baraka and the Politics of Popular Culture," p. 236.
8. Arthur Blythe, *In the Tradition* (LP, Columbia JC 36300, 1979).
9. David Murray Octet, *Ming* (LP, Black Saint BSR 0045, 1980); *Air, Air Lore* (CD, Bluebird 6578-2-RB, 1979). The overlapping connections between the musicians who played in these ensembles will be discussed later in this essay.
10. Davis, *In the Moment*, pp. 194-95.
11. Radano, *New Musical Figurations*.
12. Pareles, "Jazz Swings Back to Tradition"; Sancton, "Horns of Plenty."
13. Bob Blumenthal, "Arthur Blythe: Refreshing Traditions," p. 64.
14. *Ibid.*
15. For further discussion, see Feinstein and Komunyakaa, "Preface," in *The Jazz Poetry Anthology*, pp. xvii-xx. A useful though somewhat skewed overview of meetings between jazz musicians and poets is Wallenstein, "Poetry and Jazz. A more exhaustive survey is Nielsen, *Black Chant*.
16. Perhaps the most incomprehensible example comes from Ellison, "Jazz in the Poetry of Amiri Baraka and Roy Fisher" p. 117. She writes, with no apparent irony, "[Poets like Amiri Baraka and Roy Fisher] employed the language of jazz: the blue notes, the atonality, the polyrhythms, the extended harmonies, the melisma, the microtones, and the celebratory rhythm of swing. Simple syncopation was supplemented by the complex backbeat and shifting rhythms of the kind employed by a drummer or boogie pianist." While some of her arguments regarding rhythm and syncopation might be taken at face value, it is more difficult to understand—and she does not explain—how atonality, extended harmonies, melisma, and polyrhythms might be employed. She seems to be operating more on received wisdom here than on any solid analysis of their work.
17. Nielsen, *Black Chant*, 177.
18. *New York Art Quartet* (LP, ESP 1004, 1965).
19. Nielsen, *Black Chant*, 191.
20. *Ibid.*, 195.
21. Langston Hughes, Charles Mingus and Leonard Feather, *The Weary Blues* (CD, Verve 841 660-2, 1990), recorded March 18, 1958, New York, New York.
22. Jackson, "Jazz Performance as Ritual," pp. 45-51.
23. Charles Mingus's recorded versions of "The Clown" and "The Chill of Death" are both good examples of how this kind of work might be realized, though neither reaches the level of the Baraka-Murray-McCall recording. The former can be found on *The Clown* (CD, Rhino/Atlantic R2 75590, 1999), recorded February 13, and March 12, 1957, New York, New York, while the latter is on *Let My Children Hear Music* (LP, Columbia PC 31039, 1972 [?]), recorded September 23 and 30, October 1, and November 18, 1971, New York, New York. Better examples of such collaboration, partially inspired by Baraka, can be found in the work of individuals like Nathaniel Mackey and Jayne Cortez.
24. Harris, *Jones/Baraka Reader*, xxvii-xxx.
25. Harris, "An Interview with Amiri Baraka," p. 27; Smith, "Baraka and the Politics of Popular Culture."
26. Stephen E. Henderson, "Worrying the Line," pp. 62-63, 77-78; Sollors, "Does Axel's Castle Have a Street Address?" 408.

27. Various Artists, *Wildflowers 4: The New York Loft Jazz Sessions* (LP, Casablanca/Douglas NBLP 7048, 1977); David Murray Octet, *Home* (LP, Black Saint BSR 0055, 1982); World Saxophone Quartet, *Rhythm and Blues* (CD, Elektra/Musician 60864, 1989), *Plays Duke Ellington* (CD, Nonesuch 79137, 1986) and *Four Now* (CD, Justin Time 83, 1996). For the curious, Crouch's drumming (with Murray on tenor saxophone, Olu Dara on trumpet and fluegelhorn, and Fred Hopkins on bass) can be heard on "Shout Song" from *Wildflowers 4*.
28. *Fo deuk Revue* (CD, Justin Time JUST 94-2, 1997). Baraka joins Murray's ensemble on "Evidence" and "Chant Africain."
29. Charles, "Sono Artists' Colony"; Palmer, "Music Is Living in a Loft on 10th Ave"; Pareles, "The Village Becomes a Jazz Festival" and "'Primitive World.'" For the text of *Primitive World*, see Harris, *Jones/Baraka Reader*, pp. 400-49.
30. Joseph Jarman, *Song for* (LP, Delmark 410, 1966); Creative Construction Company, *Creative Construction Company* (2 LPs, Muse 5071 and 5097, 1970); Gene Ammons and Dexter Gordon, *The Chase* (LP, Prestige 10010, 1970); David Murray Octet, *Ming* (see note 9).
31. Pareles, "Jazz Swings Back to Tradition," 68.
32. Harris, *The Poetry and Poetics of Amiri Baraka*, p. 115.
33. Baraka, *Transblucency*, p. 203. Hereafter all references to the poem will be noted parenthetically in the text.
34. *The Duke Ellington Carnegie Hall Concerts, January 1943* (3 LPs, Prestige P-34004, 1977. Recorded 23 January 1943, New York, New York).
35. One can find the octet version of this tune on *Ming*. See note 9 for discographical information.

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