

FREE JAZZ IMPROVISATION

This site is for sharing musical playing methods of Free Jazz (Avant-Garde Jazz) and Free Improvisation.

It is maintained by John Voigt

"The whole point of all of this is to play without any givens, without any compositions. It's a quantum leap forward. You're telling human beings that they can trust their intuitions to create forms, rather than need forms to create intuitions." [Paul Bley, from Len Lyons, [Great Jazz Pianists](#)]

"There is no music without order--if that music comes from a man's innards. But that order is not necessarily related to any single criterion of what order should be as imposed from the outside...This is not a question of 'freedom' as opposed to 'non-freedom,' but rather it is a question of recognizing ideas and expressions of order." [Cecil Taylor, [Downbeat](#) Feb 25, 1965]

About John Voigt: John Voigt has played with Billy Bang, Borah Bergman, Peter Brotzmann, Roy Campbell, Denis Charles, Marilyn Crispell, Andrew Cyrille, Stu Dempster, Bill Dixon, Paul Flaherty, Bill Frisell, Malcolm Goldstein, Milford Graves, Joseph Jarman, Keith Jarrett, Oliver Lake, Jeanne Lee, Joe McPhee, Jemeel Moondoc, Thurston Moore, Joe Morris, Lawrence "Butch" Morris, Paul Motian, Bern Nix, and Zenna Parkins. He has recorded for Aum Fidelity, Eremite, Box Holder, and RRRecords (a video with T. Moore). Played at Bell Atlantic, Sound Unity, Fire In The Valley, and Vision Festivals. Many gigs at the Knitting Factory. He has published articles on Henry Grimes, Charles Mingus, Don Cherry, Morton Feldman. Voigt has lectured at the Institute of Jazz Studies; and taught at Berklee College, Boston Arts Academy and Massachusetts College of Art.

Top Ten 2001 Critics' picks [Best Jazz CDs of the Year]: "Revolt of the Negro Lawn Jockeys." Gerald Futrich--Coda, 300/301.

Top Ten 1997 Critics' Picks [Best Jazz CDs of the Year]: "Fire In The Valley." Steve Holtje--Jazziz, vol. 15/3.

Quotes: "In his hands the bass turns into a real talker, a mythical creature, a mouthpiece for the history of man. Voigt's very personal musical metaphors should not be missed."

--The Improvisor, 1993.

John Voigt is "an avatar of creative music in Boston" -- Cadence, Dec. 1997.

About a gig with Joe Morris: "Their set captured [an] alchemical, abstruse mystery [of] improvisational strategies. --Voices were in constant motion, darting off in skittering arcs yet connected around a propulsive implied pulse. The guitarist's sheets of notes spilled out in free, cyclical cascades against Voigt's splattered lines that flowed like skewed bop filtered through a fractured prism." Michael Rosenstein, Signal-to-Noise, Winter 2002.

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Tips from the Masters on How To Do It.

This page will be continually updated with more quotes from the Masters of Free Jazz/Improvisational music.

(Dear reader please send tips to me at johnvoigt@attbi.com and I'll list them for all of us to see.)

Ray Anderson: "To go open and freer enabled me to find a voice that I would never have found if I were still trying to play "Shadow of Your Smile" or something. If you can find a voice like that, then you can come back and play "Shadow of your Smile" and make it your own. So it is true, now when I play the trombone, I don't think about the notes. It is sort of like singing, I don't think about the pitch. I just play." <http://jazzweekly.com/interviews/anderson.htm>

Albert Ayler: When John Coltrane finished recording Ascension he phoned Ayler and told him, "I recorded an album and found that I was playing just like you." Ayler replied: "No man, don't you see, you were playing just like yourself. You were just feeling what I feel and were just crying out for spiritual unity."

Charles Tyler said: [Ayler] "had studied being a musician all his life, that he knew the basics as well as he did. When Al and I played together, we could suppress the natural shit we had learned and make ourselves sound like two crazy people who didn't know nothing about music!"

"My music is the thing that keeps me alive now. I must play music that is beyond this world. That is all I'm asking for in life and I don't think you can ask for more than just to be alone to create from what God gives you."
[Hotcha #53]

"It's not about the notes, it's about the sound." "You really have to play your instrument to escape from notes to sound."

"Never try to figure out what happens, because you would never get the true message." [Liner notes, Love Cry]

"Ayler does not extract individual motives from the tune and work them out (like Rollins), nor does he connect a number of organically evolving motivic chains (like Coleman). His method is to paraphrase whole themes [as in folk songs of simple melodies, harmony, and rhythms] --"I'd like to play something--like the beginning of Ghosts--that people can hum."] ...and by 'quoting' them note for note, distorting them by shifting or transposing the individual pitches. [E.Jost, Free Jazz, 125-127]

"Albert Ayler opened me up so wide in terms of listening and playing as a drummer. He'd say, 'Fill all that space out. I don't care how you do it, but do it.' He didn't want any space or holes in the music. He wanted to hear

rhythms all over. The only thing he'd tell me was, 'No time, I don't want to hear ching-ka-ching-ka-ching--no bebop.' In other words, he didn't want to hear the boom-boom-boom-boom bass drum pattern from the swing period or the syncopated, accented bass drum pattern from be-bop. There was a pulse to the music because of the melody being played, but not the kind of pulse you were normally listening for. The time-feeling was more suspended, like waves that moved along with the song. You didn't have to worry about the time. You were either playing before, or after, or in the middle of the notes Albert was playing. He would play three notes, like the first three notes of 'Summertime' and each note that he played made you hear a pattern of fifteen other notes around them. I was just phrasing on the drums around the notes he was playing." Ronald Shannon Jackson, from Paul F. Berliner: Thinking In Jazz.

(more on Ayler: <http://www.math.ucdavis.edu/~mawillia/ayler.html>)

Paul Bley: "In 1958, when I met up with Ornette Coleman (on my bandstand) many people were working on improvisation, free improvisation, because the AABA song format was getting to be a little bit repetitive. At first we thought it would be the composers that would lead us out of the popular song - Gil Evans, George Russell and so forth -- but it turned out that once the composition was over for the small orchestra the soloists just got up and played [like] Charlie Parker and ignored the philosophy of the compositions. So I went out to Los Angeles to try playing without any givens at all. It was quite successful but we weren't able to play with time. Just really totally free, so the question was how to play with time in a free harmonic way. Even if it was with time, the time could be flexible, you could speed up a phrase, slow down a phrase. One day, the guys in my band, Charlie Haden and Billy Higgins and Dave Pike brought Ornette Coleman and Don Cherry to sit in. I realised immediately when they sat in that they had solved the problem of AABA by substituting A-Z with a final A at the end as the 'songform' so to speak. That simple piece of information eluded most jazz players throughout the 50s....When I heard A-Z I thought that the door was open and we could now play written music that improvises as a leaving of the music, then leads back to it."

Paul Bley the Romantic Revolutionary by Simon Hopkins and Dan Hill
<http://motion.state51.co.uk/features/bley/>

"If you're going on a trip, you don't necessarily need a map... [When you play free improvisation you still are still working with form because] the brain refuses to go into a random mode. [Free] improvising is a good exercise to push yourself and your mind to its limits. Then when you come back to more traditional material, you can inject things that make it a richer experience." [Lyons. Great Jazz Pianists].

"So much of the music is improvised that the line between improvisation and composition pretty much disappear, so that the goal in improvising is to sound like it is composed. From the audience's point of view, they are not

really supposed to know whether it's written or improvised, so what you're really talking about is spontaneous composition, which is often called improvisation. The audience responds not so much to composition or improvisation, they respond to the individual players and what they respond to with the player is pretty much the timbre and tone of the player and the passion of a player. That's what engages an audience. The content of the music, the harmony, the rhythm, those are secondary, actually, to world-class performers. They mostly respond to the sound of the players and the fact that the player's style is recognizable to them because of recordings.

"....That album's called Not Two, Not One and it's with Paul Motian and Gary. We had played together, not necessarily as a trio, but we had played together in different combinations in the '60s. The philosophy behind that album is that it is not absolutely necessary to relate to each other when you play. You can have three parallel voices. That's one possibility, also the idea of counterpoint. Counterpoint is really not so much whether you're playing together, as to whether your own playing is imaginative enough to hold the listener's ear. So there's competition between the three players for attention, as opposed to imitating one voice or another."

<http://jazzweekly.com/interviews/bley.htm>

Bley gives tips at <http://www.improvart.com/bley/improv.htm>

Anthony Braxton: Braxton believed that just playing unplanned free improvisation probably would stop a musician from progressing in their art. So he created categories of compositional schemes such as working first from a specific saxophone sound, or a certain rhythm. His musical paradigm scheme can be found as part of Mike Heffley's awesome site. <http://mheffley.web.wesleyan.edu/abchart.htm> (more below on Heffley's site). An improvising master in her own right, Marilyn Crispell, told Fred Jung for his web site of interviews this about working with Braxton: "I got a sense of space, of composition, listening. Working with him was wonderful. He respected everything that you did. He saw who you were. He heard what you were trying to say. He never criticized the way you played his music....We didn't rehearse very much. He tended to like to work with people who had a good sense of what his music was about and who were good sight readers. He would bring in new compositions a half an hour before we played a concert and we would sing through them, sing through our parts backstage. So even though the music was very complex it never got the rehearsal that it deserved. But he didn't want a perfect performance. That wasn't what he was after. He would give you a blueprint and then you would play. He said that if you played the music too perfectly you were doing it wrong." <http://jazzweekly.com/interviews/mcrispell.htm>

Mike Heffley, musician and writer, is to Anthony Braxton as Boswell was to Samuel Johnson. You must go to his site to begin to explore the world of Braxton <http://mheffley.web.wesleyan.edu/>

Heffley has a site for Braxton's Tri-Metric System go to <http://mheffley.web.wesleyan.edu/almatexts/almamusicology/abcomp.htm#5>

[what follows is from:] Anthony Braxton: The Third Millennial Interview, with Mike Heffley.

Published in Signal-To-Noise Winter 2002, Issue 24, and at <http://mheffley.web.wesleyan.edu/ab3m/ab3m1.htm>

"In the beginning, formula musics, alternative coding musics, taking from people's initials; formula musics, quasi-serial adaptations; schematic musics, looking at the composite time space and then dividing that time-space up. Language musics, twelve identities in the house of the circle that could be used for improvisational strategies, to place with the schematic musics; dimensional drawing constructions, musics that more and more start to factor internal components in terms of designations about factoring real-time pitch logic integration and strategies. Hieroglyphic structures as a means to start factoring in holistic musics, color and sound; Composition 76, factoring in gesture and movement. Finally, Composition 82, spatial trajectory musics, coming after Gruppen and Kari, and Polytrope for Orchestra by Xenakis; trajectorial coding strategies. Composition 113, holistic strategies; Composition 174, gradient logic strategies, and area-space mapping musics; Composition 175, Garthstone Castle, an example of area-space mapping musics. Ghost Trance musics, focusing in on the house of one, the house of Shala; the house of Shala from a tricentric standpoint, fulfilling the poetic dimensions of the Tri-Axium Writings, going from there into the Trillium operas into, now, the house of one, as the mystic identity space of one. Ghost Trance musics into the form-scheme-space models: continental spaces, as in the United States being a continental space. In the context of my system, going through the twelve great lands of my system as akin to Disneyland, a la post-Disneyland constructions that have tri-centric virtual experiences for twelve sonic playlands that demonstrate continental mapping experiences for the friendly experiencer, single or group tours.

When I think of the future, I'd like to continue to work with my project, to go through the house of two, the house of three, the house of four, to build a music that's consistent with all of the defined parameters of my system: the galactic parameters, stories about going into space, mapping space. I want a music that equals the human genome project; I want a music that equals the projects of NASA going into space with different trajectories that start to map galactic particulars. I want to fulfill all twelve operas of the Trillium musics, which will also be accompanied by the book of Shala, the book of Ashmenton, the book of Joreo.

My project has always been, one, an individual thing; two, it's always been a tri-centric thing; and three, it's always been an occult position. The heart of the work that I'm trying to do, on the plane of symbolic musics, and ritual and ceremony, is to create a context of experience that will bow to the

concept of, one, transcendent realities--and by that I mean gods, goddesses, and mystery children. Two, a concept of transcendence that connects the world of ideas into the world of apparent reality that finally connects into the world of transcendence, where, one, the ghosts can come back and play; two, it's trans-temporal, past present and future is one unit; three, everything is in every tempo and there's a connection into any part of the tri-centric parameter."

Peter Brotzmann: In the late 1990's I was lucky enough to do a gig with Brotzmann for Michael Ehlers (the Eremite Record guy) concert series in Amherst Massachusetts. I was nervous about it. All I could think about was the story of his playing so forcefully that once he had broken one of his ribs he was blowing so hard into his saxophone. The gig began and anything I played on the bass Brotzmann heard and incorporated somehow in his own playing. It was like being an integral part of a hurricane! As powerful as this musician is, his ears were even bigger. And I was part of it. Once again I learned that the better player is, the easier it is to play with him or her. [Voigt]

William Parker said, "I hear him [Brotzmann] and I don't hear any Albert Ayler or John Coltrane. He's from Germany and he's got a different background. .. Peter is very, very into flowers, into bird watching, into nature, and into looking at beautiful things. You go on tour with him and you get up at six in the morning and he'll be sitting in a field. People don't think of him that way, but that also is a strain that goes through this music and also his travels to Japan and Africa. There's an influence there. I think that's more where Peter himself is coming from, the idea of a painter, of a blender of colors and cultures that he's visited as well as his own X factor, which is Peter Brotzmann, which is not connected to anything except his own sound. I think that's what dominates his playing..... Brotzmann is really into birds. He's really into poetry. He's really into certain things. That's really the foundation of the music even though people just may hear a sound and say that that is Albert Ayler, but in closer examination, you really realize that that's not Albert Ayler and everyone has their own particular angle and sound coming out of their instrument. You just can't just lump them together." <http://jazzweekly.com/interviews/wparker.htm>

Jaki Byard: [on free playing] "Actually I think that's a bad term. There's no such thing as freedom, because when people play the piano they are automatically governed by certain patterns that they absorbed during their lifetime, and they are obligated to do what they know best. Cecil Taylor might play for forty-five minutes, but he's got some patterns in his mind. You can quote this: all humans have patterns in thought, and they come out musically. Nobody can change that. There's no argument on it because it's the truth." [Lyons. [Great Jazz Pianists](#)]

Denis Charles: I worked with this fantastic drummer once, about nine months before he died. He didn't know me, or what or how I played, and

very sweetly tried to hip me to the music. "We're not going to be using anything like that Real Book," he said. I nodded my head. Then he put the whole thing in one sentence: "Just play what you feel." And I did. And whatever I played he heard and made it sound better by what he played. He was definitely one of the masters of this music. [Voigt]

Don Cherry: "He repeats themes several times in ostinato fashion, gradually getting away from mere literal repetition and evolving variants of it." [John Maurer]

Ornette Coleman: Comment: (Charlie Parker, when he began playing by teaching himself, he thought that there was just one scale the do-re-me thing. When he realized he was wrong, he practiced in all the twelve major, and minor scales. He learned all the possible chords from these scales. Therefore when he played his approach was to use all these scales and chords.

But Ornette Coleman when he began playing by teaching himself, he thought that the C scale on the alto saxophone was the same as the C scale on piano (it actually sounds an Eb scale, that's why it's called an Eb alto saxophone). Coleman's music continued to develop along these lines: not atonal (no key signatures) but rather what I call multi-tonal: he plays in a distinct key area for a brief time then jumps to another distinct key area.)[J. Voigt]

"Have the instrument play you." "A musician should listen to what his instrument wants to play." Comment: rather than play the "correct" (usually European classical) play what naturally comes out of your instrument--including any squeaks and squawks. Check out the way Coleman plays violin.

About Ornette Coleman's methods: "Coleman did use chords and scales [as a basis for improvisation] but also used...a mood, fragment of a melody, area of pitch, rhythmic fragment...rejection of equal temperament." [Francis Davis. In The Moment]. In Coleman's words, "Play ideas and sounds and thoughts rather than a pattern on your instrument." [Downbeat June 1986]

Coleman on intonation and timbre: [My intonation is about] the vocalization of the sound...human pitch...the human quality...[don't think about playing the pitch] higher or lower, but by playing it differently ."When I play an F in a song called 'Peace,' I think it should not sound exactly like the same note in a piece called 'Sadness.'" [E. Jost. Free Jazz] "You can play sharp in tune and flat in tune." [Lyons. 101 Best Jazz Albums]

"You can always reach into the human sound of a voice on your horn if you're actually hearing and trying to express the warmth of the human voice." [Liner notes to Something Else]. "To get the instrument to more or less speak." [Liner notes for Free Jazz]

"Notes are like water--they take the shape of whoever's using them. Your C can make someone cry, but someone else's C can make someone laugh. That's the beauty of creation, that we all don't have to be on one line to get the same result....The thing that I really want to achieve in my lifetime is to inspire people to be individuals. That to me is it." [[Downbeat](#) June 1986]

Coleman on harmony: His early instructions to Charlie Haden: "Here are the changes I was hearing when I wrote the melody, but you don't have to play them. Let's all listen to each other and remember the melody, the feeling of it, and play from that...[If you hear it] that note's going to be right, and not because it's read off the page." [Lyons. [101 Best Jazz Albums](#)]

"Let's try to play the music and not the background [the harmony-chords of the song]...[the music] should be a direct and immediate] expressing our minds and emotions rather than being a background for emotions." "[Harmonic unison](#) [also called [unison harmony](#)] each horn has its own note to play but they are so spaced that the result will not sound like harmony but like unison. [Liner notes for [Free Jazz](#)]

When you get creatively blocked [in your solos] change registers; or make the dominant note the tonic, and the tonic note the dominant. [Coleman's comments to his guitarist Bern Nix]

John Coltrane: One of Trane's last wishes was that Albert Ayler and Ornette Coleman play at his funeral. Coltrane began as an alto sax playing clone of Charlie Parker, and died too soon at age forty as the center of jazz's future movement (as in Avant-Garde). I heard him in 1957 with Miles Davis. I sat a few feet in front of him. What amazed me then (I was just a kid) was that his sound was not loud--but the sound seemed to point itself right into a microphone. His notes were like small sized silver stilettos. Really he was practicing on the gig. When Bill Evans played static harmonies, Trane would run different unrelated chords against them. When the piano's chords moved quickly, Trane seemed to disregard them also; he often played a (usually altered) scale against them. Miles seemed to ignore him. The audience made up of teen-aged musicians thought he sucked. Throughout his career, John Coltrane continued that process of piling complex chords and scales on top of tonal areas. But by the end he was creating more sound color washes than playing in the mainstream jazz improvisational style of connect-the-note/dots. Before, critic Ira Gitler had called Coltrane's style "sheets of sound" because Gitler's ears were not good enough to hear those rapidly descending chord and scale tones. But what he said did become true. From 1965 to 1967 Coltrane with his band members were creating [sound surfaces](#). [Voigt].

Coltrane's own words on all this are "I could stack up chords--say on a C7, I sometimes superimposed an E dim. 7, up to an F#7, down to an F. That way I could play three chords on one. But on the other hand, if I wanted to, I could play melodically. Miles Davis' music gave me plenty of freedom. [Also] at that time the tendency was to play the entire scale of each chord.

Sometimes what I played didn't work out in eighth notes, 16th notes, or triplets. I had to put the notes in uneven groups like fives and sevens in order to get them all in.....I haven't completely abandoned this approach, but it wasn't broad enough. I'm trying to play these progressions in a more flexible manner now." [Downbeat Sept. 1960]

Laurence Cook: [a paraphrase] The older jazz is like representational painting where you paint a portrait of a person or a thing. That's playing on a song and its chords. The new music is like modern painting, Action Painting. you concern yourself with the surface of the canvas, with the brush strokes, the texture of the paint, the total two-dimensional surface. I concern myself with the way the drum stick strikes the cymbal, the surface of the drum head.

"Free music is like searching for an address and driving around the block thirty times trying to find it. Many times you don't find it, but when you do, Ahh!"

Andrew Cyrille: I have had the privilege of working with Cyrille several times, and on each one I heard him do something totally new and fantastic. I believe him to be one of the Masters of our music. On one gig he took a solo by playing the walls and floors of the bandstand, then he began playing on his body, then--with mouth open to amplify the sound--played with clenched fists on the top of his head. Totally awesome. [J. Voigt]

He pioneered what he calls "conversational rhythms," rhythms that come from patterns of speech. "I don't ever recall saying to myself 'I'm going to play like ... [Sunny Murray, Milford Graves]. I just did what I thought was right at the time, playing what I call 'conversational rhythms.' We don't talk in 4/4 time or 3/4 or 6/8 or 7/4, we just talk. So this is the way the music comes out to me when I play free. That's the prescription." [Coda Dec. 1984]

"You can play in two different ways. You can play from a prescription of changes and meter. Let's say you are playing just a regular blues. You are going to have a certain number of chords that are applied to certain bars in the 12-bar format that is done with a repetitive format. What most bebop musicians do is they make melodies on those changes. Now, with somebody like Cecil, what happens is that you might play a group of chords for a certain period of time or you might submit notes from a certain register of the piano and then there is no meter. Usually what happens is that you begin a phrase and you follow it to its natural conclusion. So within those two given techniques, you can improvise, which means you compose, organize, perform what hear in the moment. That is the same thing that you do when you are playing changes, it is just that the concept is different." <http://jazzweekly.com/interviews/cyrille.htm>

Bill Dixon: [Playing with Dixon was a major advent in my life. I recommend visiting his site and studying the man and his music--Voigt] <http://www.rovers.net/~wrdixon/> From his book, L'Opera: "Loosely attack the [playing] situation by the immediate approaching of the musical idea through instant playing; setting the mood and character of the piece and cueing the other members of the ensemble as to when they should enter; also giving them the range area in which they are to explore and indicating by hand signals the density each individual member will use on his instrument; and also whether or not they will play (by hand signal) melodically or vertically; also indicating whether they will 'trade' off with other instruments (as far as their space situation in the composition is concerned) and indicating the level of the dynamics." [Dixon, L'Opera, p. 157]

Hamid Drake has become one of the leading drummers of the music in just the past few years. I had the good fortune to write about his work on a new CD, -- *Live Vol. 1*--released January 2002. It's a duo with saxophonist Assif Tsahar on the Ayler Records based in Sweden. This comes from that study: Hamid Drake was born August 3, 1955 in Monroe, Louisiana. He grew up in Chicago where he met Fred Anderson with whom he has worked from 1974 to the present. Besides the drum set, he has studied tablas and Islamic music. He worked extensively with Don Cherry from 1978 until his passing in 1995. More recently he has been appearing with Peter Brotzmann and William Parker. Significant to Drake's music is his involvement with Reggae bands which began in the 1970s. Hamid Drake cites his sources of inspiration as Peter Brotzmann, Don Cherry, his parents Henry and Amelia Drake, Islamic Sufism, and Tibetan Buddhism.

Drake gives coherence to the waves of freely improvised music by working from a grooving solid beat--but with a hundred or more variations that show the influence of Reggae, New Orleans marches, funk-rock, even the mainstream jazz swing of Max Roach. He takes a rhythmic figure and explores it, expands it, permutes it, and feeds it back to the musicians around him. Often he'll take patterns in 4/4 and transfer them into 3/4, 6/8, or 12/8.

Eric Dolphy: Alan Saul has a great site with sound bites, pictures, recordings, discussion group, links, etc. <http://farcry.neurobio.pitt.edu/Eric.html> What follows is an abridgment of an interview from there: "It's possible to play any note you want to against chords, say an F# chord against an F7, but first be able to hear it. These other notes give expressions to the song, otherwise you'd be playing what everybody else is playing. To my hearing they're exactly correct....Some things you play are not based on chords, they're based on the freedom of sound. You start with one line and you keep inventing, creating, until you state a phrase. Not to exhibit technique, but to enhance some kind of musical sense. It happens at the moment and should be natural, intuitive."

Charlie Haden: Haden told me one of the most profound things about the music that I ever heard. "Making it is playing the music you want to play." [Think about it, that says it all.] Another gem he told me is about how it's done: "It doesn't matter what you call it--Shit, God, the Clouds--but you send up antenna from your head and you pick up the music to play from that source outside yourself." At a lecture he gave: [paraphrase] The creativity that you learn in playing music becomes a major life skill and help in life, even if you never become a professional musician. [J. Voigt]

Ronald Shannon Jackson: "With certain groups, like Albert Ayler, Cecil Taylor, Ornette Coleman, Blood, and now my own group, The Decoding Society, there is a level of playing that we try to reach which is the same thing that people do when they do transcendental meditation and yoga. They talk about 'out-of-the-body' experiences. That's what this music is. It's chanting; it's meditation; it's yoga. It's all these things. In order to play, something transcends. Something happens with the physical, the spiritual, and the mental states in which they combine, and their energy is turned free. It's a cleansing experience which in a religion they would say, 'It's of another world.' The state I'm talking about even transcends emotions. It's a feeling of being able to communicate with all living beings. (from:) Paul F. Berliner: Thinking In Jazz.

Keith Jarrett: Before he plays he puts his mind in a zen state of total awareness/no thinking. In his words he forgets all past experience, even his knowledge of how to play the piano: "At the beginning, I am completely empty of any musical thought. If I am not able to empty myself, I almost invariably have a concert that isn't as good." [Downbeat Oct. 1974]

Charles Mingus: "I think the most unique thing about avant-garde is the rhythmic patterns that the guys are making. The people are going by the rhythms rather than by the musical sounds." [Changes Magazine, 6-1973]

Jemeel Moondoc: Moondoc is one of the most complex, indeed bizarre, personalities that I have ever played and that all shows in his music. At times he sounds as if he simply can not play the saxophone, that indeed he is a total musical illiterate. But trust me, he often touches pure genius. It's just that he and his music often can be difficult, and then he and his music can often be totally simple, loving, and organic. He is well studied, years with Cecil Taylor, Bill Dixon. Do listen to his work on Eremitic Records. I especially like *Revolt of the Negro Lawn Jockeys*. For more Moondoc information go to <http://www.eremite.com/>.

In one sentence: He is about the merging of his South Side of Chicago black music past--and especially the blues--with post Ornette Coleman New York Downtown acoustic free jazz improvisation. I asked him about this and he told me: "This is what it is: Robert Johnson playing the music as in a dominate chord being a minor chord at the same time. This is the truth that defies what has become the standard way of main stream jazz musicians

playing what they call the blues. Blacks allowed the music to be harnessed by the dominate culture; the white man telling the black man you are not playing that right. And black players, too many of them, went for that lie. A social issue more than a musical one. The blues, it was a folk music--a story. [The form is] one stanza /it repeats/ then it is answered. So the story had a solution (or not a solution). This is what is happening: It's not a twelve bar pattern of dominate chords; it is " *I fell of my mule*" or "*Don't let a big legged woman get you down.*" When you play the blues you need to tell a story, not run some half-assed academic's definition of harmony."

He told me how he teaches new students. 1) study the title of a song--what does it represent? 2) Play the song until you have it. 3) If the student doesn't like the song, tell them to do something different: Improvise. (Then etude/exercises might be useful, but I don't know how.) 4) When improvising on the song, play what you hear [not on chords or scales]. Maybe in a totally different key, that's ok. 5) And develop your own sound. [Voigt]

Thurston Moore: After finishing my first Vision Festival gig with Thurston Moore, I asked him how he did it, how he played the way he did. His answer was fantastic as is his musical abilities: "First I put my mind on empty, and then I become a ghost." I figure that ghost is like the end of the 19th century's English seance specters: radiant globs of spooky light that flash in the darkness. [Voigt]. Thurston tells us about his top ten favorite free jazz CDs at at <http://www.evol.org/free.jazz.html> .

Butch Morris: I had the pleasure of working with Butch Morris for a week in 1988 at Tufts University. There I learned to work with his "Conduction" Method of composition. I hope someday someone writes a book about Conduction. Its history seems to go as far back as Egypt--the ancient pictures show conductors using their hands to work with the ensembles of musicians and singers. Gospel conductors use a conduction-like technique with choirs today. It is a way to bring order to larger ensembles playing in a free improvisation style. The same *how to find order in freedom*, which I guess is what this entire web site is about. The following comes from a book that came with his monumental CD set: Lawrence D. "Butch" Morris. Testament: A Conduction Collection , released by New World Records 80478-2.

Introduction To Conduction Vocabulary

The conduction vocabulary developed from the need (or desire) to interact and/or to create a spontaneous improvisational dialogue with the music, musicians, and environment.

First, and most important, there is no music to look at. There is only the conductor, and the conductor needs your attention 100% of the time. It never fails that someone will always look away when the music needs them the most.

Conduction is process and product, ensemble music, teamwork. It is a music of personal histories and individuals. It is not limited to style or category. It is not jazz, blues, pop, classical, free, and so forth, although it may encompass all or none of them. Finally all are misleading. It is the conductor's responsibility to mold this simultaneous synthesis of sound and organization into one ensemble. Your personality should always be in your music. When you are not playing, you should be thinking of what you would be playing. You must make music all the time, whatever you think music is.

Respond to what (you think) you hear or see or understand. Execution must be deliberate and decisive.

Conduction is an ensemble music. Its vocabulary is interpretive. The student must pay attention to the language of the body and the baton.

CONDUCTION VOCABULARY--SIGNS & GESTURES

Down Beat is used after a preparatory command. Usually given with the baton, but may be given with the left hand or body.

Sustain (chord or continuous sound) left hand extended, palm up, followed by *down beat*.

Repeat (three circumstances) 1. If you are not playing--you must create something to repeat. 2. If you are playing something--the conductor would like to hear it again. 3. If someone is playing something, and the conductor would like you to play it--the sign for repeat is given with the left hand to form the letter "U."

Mock (or Mimic) (similar to repeat #3). You are to mock a player or sound. The conductor will point to the left ear, then to the player or area of sound to be mocked. This is followed by a *down beat*.

Dynamics (Loud - Soft) Raising the palms up for loud, down for soft. There is immediate response to this gesture, with no *down beat*. Or a clenched fist in the chest area for loud, left hand finger to the lips for soft, both given with a *down beat*.

Memory If a particular section or phrase is to be committed to memory the conductor will point, with left hand to (left) temple and designate a number with left hand using fingers as the number. When this action (left hand to temple and number) is repeated with a *down beat*, you are to recall that particular area. Whatever you were playing when the number designation was given was given is what you will return to when it is given with *down beat*.

Hold (Don't Play) Left palm facing ensemble. This is usually given when the conductor wants to give a preparatory command. This is done to give the ensemble ample time to understand the direction.

Change in Tonality (Key or Tonal Center) Left hand thumb up or down, with *down beat*.

Division of Ensemble Slicing motion with left hand, to separate or divide the ensemble in parts or sections.

Time (Pulse) is given with the baton, tapping rate of desired time. This may be given with a *down beator* asked for as an immediate response.

Rhythm is given with the baton as if beating a rhythm figure in mid-air. The left hand marks the beginning of the phrase. A *down beat* is given to begin, generally preceded by a *hold*.

Develop (Or Go On) is given to indicate when the musician is to develop a phrase, a repeat, or sonic area. This is done by pointing with the right hand to the extreme right (flank), arm extended. This may be done with or without a *down beat*.

Continue In This Way Pointing finger of left hand--(two) little circles directed at the musician you wish to continue a developmental process.

Expand is used to develop a phrase or area, then to bring it back. This is done by placing both hands in front of the body (extended arms) together (for the phrase) then separating the hands for the development.

Entry (Come In or Feature) A wave of the hand, as if to beckon--to improvise. The response is immediate.

Literal Movement The sign for this command is to place the baton parallel to the body, in front of the face, after which the baton serves as a tool for mid-air graphics. In *literal movement*, and all graphic information, the lower the sound on the instrument. The higher the baton, the higher the sound. The *down beat* is the beginning of the gesture.

Panorama (Pan or Panning) The sign for *pan* is the baton upside-down parallel to the body, the *down beat* is when the baton moves across the ensemble. 1) If you are not playing when the baton enters your physical (body) field, you play. When the baton is out of your field, you stop. 2) If you are playing when the sign for *panorama* is given--it is the exact opposite of #1: As the baton enters your field, you stop playing. When the baton departs, you begin.

Melodic Movement is a gesture used to suggest melody. This can be done in a variety of ways--I have used it by beating time with the left hand and giving graphic information with the right hand. This is done with a preparatory command, without stopping the movement, giving a *down beat*.

In theory, all gestures are open to interpretation. However a graphic

movement such as: ~ ~ ~ should not sound like: ----- .

As you can imagine, there are a lot of questions in a conduction workshop or rehearsal. I try to let the ensemble answer their own questions so as not to limit its interpretive response.

Joe Morris: What follows is from an interview I had with Joe in July 2001:

JV: When you were teaching at Tufts you had the students play and then explain what they were doing. When you first told me that I thought it was ass backwards, because for me the problem with most music education is having the students analyze their music technically without listening to it first.

JM: It wasn't a traditional music theory kind of approach. Their assignment was to play something that was improvised, then rationalize it, at least answer the question why they played what they did. A student saxophonist played a deeply passionate solo. It wasn't all that good, but it was very moving, very passionate. I asked him what it was about, to explain it. He told me he had gotten a very bad mark on one of his tests, and he was a swimmer and he had done very badly at a meet, and so he felt very bad about himself and he decided that he would try to express his feelings on the saxophone. Which he did.

JV: You have them tell a story with their music?

JM: No, not a story. It is so they have a purpose for playing. Technique is [should be] developed after the aesthetic. Real musicians don't play music based on technique. They play to make a statement about their existence on the planet, whether they are conscious of that or not. At least that's what I do. It's developing a technique to express something that cannot be expressed in words. When you're speaking about an elemental thing like contemplating the nature of existence you can't use specific language. You need to use a language that is also elemental, that is part of nature, and music is an elemental form of nature. Its inexplicable. Its vibrational. You have to develop a technique to express something that is inexplicable. That's what Charlie Parker did. His expression was so powerful that it inspired millions of people afterwards. Parker was talking about life on the planet and everyone wants to be like that so they copy him. Until someone else comes along and says "Wait a minute. What he really is talking about is an individual expression about life and existence. How about if I do that." And that's how I learned to play.

JV: It's expression in notes and sounds, not words?

JM: Yes, in this kind of music. But it can be done in words. Poetry is the same thing. The problem is that all the time people analyze this music technically, but they fail to analyze it aesthetically. Part of that is based on racism because they can't possibly imagine that a black musician could have a very high level thought that he then transfers into a really

sophisticated technical thing. They don't expect that will happen. They rule out the possibility. When in fact African music--of course we don't have to legitimize it anymore--African music stores history.

JV: When you're playing do you think about intervals?

JM: I don't think specific intervals. It's connected to my ears. I'm singing. I can sing anything I play. I use a template sense of melodic structure that can be compounded. It's kind of modular--although I don't like that word. I use different groups of melodies. I use the intervals in the melodies as a landscape, a kind of map, a template. Then I use that as reference points so that I don't continually repeat myself. It's like saying I can go to Bb here and I can go down a minor third here. But I can also invert that anyway I want to. I can transpose that anyway I want, alter it. I can play that staccato, rubato, legato. I can do whatever I want and I can still keep a continuity. That's a pretty common thing with many players, but putting that on the guitar is different. I think that's what Cecil Taylor does. He calls it "tonal center," but it really is melodic structure. All the best jazz is melodic structure, the harmony comes after the fact. I still play off chords sometimes, but I don't just play off chords. I can get into that rarefied space that my heroes are in, so I don't simply play like a bad jazz guitarist version of something. I actually create something like they have created. You have to get past just playing a version of what someone else, someone great did. You have to do something great yourself. And you either succeed or fail with that. But if you don't try then you'll never get to experience the whole thing. I want to experience the whole thing. I want the deepest experience from this I can get.

JV: How else do you teach people?

JM: I get them to sing and play what they hear.

[a few days later I again talked with Joe Morris]

JV: How much of the alphabet and language of traditional jazz theory--chords, scales, improvising on standard tunes, do you need to learn before you can properly express yourself in free jazz?

JM: You need to learn the syntax, that's what's important. [Syntax is the formal properties, the arrangement, the grammar used to give meaning.] Syntax is always in the music. The music is replenished, revitalized, by fleshing out the syntax, the skeletal component of it, if you think of it as language. As time passes. In each of our lives there is a version of that syntax that describes things that can't be described in any other way [but by our music].

JV: Is this taught with regular jazz education?

JM: No, no. That's just the analysis of the invention of all that stuff. Someone has analyzed that to see how someone else played; but playing

isn't important, inventing it is what is important. You must describe your time on the planet [your life experiences] by using your music. You need to speak as fluently and with as much subtly as you can to describe as much as possible. That's why my music's varied: some of it is about sound, or harmonics, or melodies, or intervals, some swings, some doesn't, some things are happy, some are not, some is abstract. You're supposed to describe as much as you can so that you make people think [experience]. That's the whole point.

JV: How did you learn your syntax?

JM: Listening, hanging out with people, talking, reading, trying to find out what the issues were, trying to find out how to conduct myself, how to defend myself, how to get away from the rules that everyone was imposing on me, even from the people that I deeply admired. So I played with Cecil Taylor and I leave and I think I never want to do that again.

From Mole Magazine #13: "I really don't care so much about chords. I like to have a lot of melodic components on top of one another. I figure that everybody who improvises knows by dealing with melody how to harmonize that--as long as you let them make choices about it. I never try to avoid harmony; I would rather have things result in harmony than force harmony on it. Mainly because I think approaching jazz or improvised music from the point of harmony has pretty much worked itself to a dead end. I prefer to take it note to note--so I deal with intervals, which have some type of phrase shape to them, and that makes them a melody. Then I try to have everybody else play either along with the melody, play a counter-melody, or play some type of thing that colors the situation as we're playing. I can either describe it for them, or write it out for them, or I sometimes let them do it themselves, depending on how strong they are and how in touch they are with what I'd like to have happen in my own situation."

For more about Joe Morris go to his web site: <http://www.joe-morris.com/>

Evan Parker: What follows is taken from Parker's comments on his composition, **De Motu**.

"What is the role of the learnt instrumental technique in the form of an improvisors work? And what of learnt material where it is possible to separate material from technique. The improviser seems to be working with memories of past improvisations which were themselves, at least in part, imagined at the time they were made but which may also have made use of material that had been learned by rote and techniques which have become automatic, shifting material from one area of consciousness to another, moving back and forth between the known and the unknown. Since I came across the ideas of left and right hemisphere specialisation of brain function in the works of Shah, Ornstein, Edwards and others it has helped to explain in part what happens: in the course of an improvisation the left hemisphere set of functions predominate at the outset and then gradually, if things are

working well, a shift to right brain dominance takes place. In this mode things become physically possible which would be impossible 'cold'.

Improvisation As Compositional Method.

"At some time in 1974 I started to think about the whole issue of personal style and whether or not it was compatible with 'free' improvisation'. Around this time I was beginning to change my mind about solo improvising and was starting to try things involving longer units of fixed material. Up to that point I had been concentrating on collective improvisation in which rapid interaction between the players required smaller and smaller units of musical contribution from any one individual and the procedures of free atonal construction from pure intervallic sequences combined with some equivalent to the idea of klangfarbenmelodie in the resulting music. This approach might be termed "atomistic". In such an approach any individual style was subsumed in the collective or at least was intended to be. The distinction with solo playing has been nicely put by John Butcher in the notes to his recent CD Thirteen friendly numbers: 'Despite their special and distinctive qualities, improvisation and composition are not neatly separated activities. For the 'improviser' this becomes clearest with solo-playing, where personal concerns are unmodulated by other musicians' input.' Realising that I was interested then in the challenge that solo playing represented I was aware that my approach had become overly concerned with the modulation of other musicians' input!"

"I asked myself what were the longest units of material that could be incorporated into an improvisation? In answering this question I gradually developed the use of additive procedures for building patterns and used repetition/mutation procedures which have characterised much of my subsequent solo improvising. Two qualities have been remarked on consistently in the intervening period: comparisons with electronically synthesized music and references to machines....Through the repetition of simple phrases which evolve by slow mutations (a note lost here, a note added there, a shift of accent, dynamic or tone colour) their apparent "polyphonic" character can be manipulated to show the same material in different perspectives. The heard sound is monitored carefully and the small increments of change introduced to maintain or shift interest and the listeners' attention."

"Recent popularisation of the ideas of chaos theory means that most people are now familiar with fractal patterns and Mandelbrot figures. Without wishing to jump on a band wagon, the process involved in the evolution of a phrase in this way of improvising has something in common with the equations that generate these patterns and figures where the output from one basically simple calculation is used as the input for the next calculation in an iterative process which by many repetitions finally generates a pattern or figure whose complexity is not foreseeable from the starting point."

"The challenge for me in solo improvising is to fill the acoustic space. Exploiting natural acoustic resonances the illusion of 'polyphony' can be

enhanced. The activity of maintaining several layers of activity has more in common with the circus arts of juggling and acrobatics than with the soul searching of high art (or whatever it is supposed to be about). I don't question the possibility of music appearing to 'mean something' or in fact actually meaning something beyond the manipulation of sound ... I think of music's strength as it's power to point at a dimension beyond the mundane, beyond the known, to allude to the unknowable, the metaphysical, the mystical, the other, but I am very wary of a programme note explaining precisely how or why this has been attempted."

"In testing my limits of duration I worked on two techniques which have given a particular character to what I now feel free to call my style. Using an up/down motion of the tongue, rather than the standard technique of tu-ku using throat attack, I developed a double tonguing which was faster and more flexible and capable of use over a wider dynamic range. This technique made rapid successions of notes of very short durations possible. I think I hear this technique in the music of Charlie Parker, Pharaoh Saunders, Wayne Shorter and Jan Garbarek. To extend durations beyond a breath length I worked on circular breathing technique in which a small reserve of air in the cheeks is pushed through the instrument while the diaphragm is used to breath in through the nose. I had heard Roland Kirk use this technique and recordings of folk music from Africa and the Middle East were an inspiration. I worked on the reed's ability to sustain a lower pitch while articulating selected overtones combining the method for overtone selection which I learnt from the best book ever written on saxophone technique, Sigurd Rascher's "Top Tones for Saxophone", with a sense of possibilities gained by listening to Steve Lacy. I worked on sustaining overtones and interjecting lower notes which is basically the same technique with different timing."

"I haven't worked much with singing into the instrument because unlike the trombone or dijeridu, I don't like the sound it makes very much, it makes me think of kazoo or comb-and-paper and I only do it unconsciously or in extremis. (Although every so often I'll hear something by Dewey Redman that makes me feel lazy for having that attitude.) As a young man in 1960 I was filled with excitement at the prospect of hearing Coltrane's original Atlantic recording of "My Favorite Things" after reading a review in Downbeat that described part of the solo sounding like two lines at once. Coltrane subsequently developed those ideas further, arguably more on the tenor than on the soprano. Given the extra physical effort needed to fill the tenor with air this was remarkable. I gained confidence in the possibilities of repetition after working with John Tchicai at one of those SWF Baden-Baden meetings organised by Joachim Berendt. Listening to the drum music from various African cultures on records, especially the wonderful work published by Ocora and thinking about polyrhythms I started to work on patterns of fingering in which the left and right hands worked in different superimposed rhythms. To some extent this overlapped with work on broken air columns (so called cross-fingerings) and thoughts on how to

apply the fundamentals of Bartolozzi's pioneering work "New Sounds for Woodwind" to the saxophone. At a certain point I had a flash of insight the force of which I still find difficult to communicate: that the saxophone can just as well be seen as a closed tube that can be opened in various ways as an open tube that can be closed in various ways. Although this thought may sound obvious I suspect it has been one of the most important keys to my development. Since Sigurd Rascher showed in 1951 that all the major and minor scales could be played as overtones of the five lowest tones on the instrument the view of the saxophone has been transformed. Speaking of extended technique in general, multiphonics, altissimo register, micro-tonal tunings can all be seen as part of the same study. As Rascher said in 1961, '..the student who realises that mind (concept) and body (embouchure, fingering) must work together, will in due course succeed. We underestimate, too often, the power of the active mind.'

"All the technical considerations mentioned above are part of a total developing awareness of the instrument as a channel for the imagination but at the same time as a shaper and perhaps limiter of the imagination. In the end the saxophone has been for me a rather specialised bio-feedback instrument for studying and expanding my control over my hearing and the motor mechanics of parts of my skeleto-muscular system and their improved functioning has given me more to think about. Sometimes the body leads the imagination sometimes the imagination (Rascher's 'active mind') leads the body."

The Specifics of Preparation for the Rotterdam [Concert].

"In the period of preparation I made notes of ideas and patterns as they occurred to me in a method that can be seen as analogous to a painter's sketchbook where fragments of what might become the final work are treated in isolation from one another. By way of illuminating this process I later recorded each of these fragments in a new version. The notated outlines are numbered in the "sketch score" in the sequence that they appear on the tape. Where the figure suggested it, I improvised in a rather controlled way in order to illustrate how these fragments may be developed in performance. This may take the form of a gradual accellerando in order to show the changing impact of the phrase at different tempi, or a working of variations in the precise form of the pattern, usually keeping strictly at first to the basic notes of the pattern."

"In some patterns I add other notes outside the original pattern or superimpose a layer or two of higher partials that can be played without losing some sense of the original pattern. In some cases all of these processes happen in one sketch. In no case are these to be thought of as music or complete improvised pieces. They are purely illustrative. They are not always particularly well played and in the case of example 14 the mess I get into is a good illustration of how things can go wrong. This demonstrates clearly that there can certainly be "wrong notes" in free improvisation!"

[The whole article can be found at <http://www.shef.ac.uk/misc/rec/ps/efi/fulltext/demotu.html> . The full Evan Parker site that contains the article's site is <http://www.shef.ac.uk/misc/rec/ps/efi/mparker.html>.]

William Parker: William Parker deserves his his place as a leading member of this music. Besides his obvious talent, he is a good man, totally professional, yet a true gentleman. After the Sound Unity Festival--a precursor to the current Vision Festival--he payed all of us in cash, then strapped his very expensive bass on his back, and walked into the night-time chaos of the mid-1980's Lower East Side, complete with its street junkies and undesirables. He reminded me of a saint, only concerned with the pile of music manuscripts in his shoulder bag that he was working on for his dancer wife Patricia. [Voigt]

He is also brilliant exponent of how we play what we play: "Before a concert sometimes I'm thinking, ok I want to do something I never did before. We start the concert and the sound begins. It's like stepping through a car wash: for some reason all the pre-sort gets washed away immediately and then you're left out on the ocean without a boat. I mean what are you going to do? Sometimes you want somebody to do something and they don't do anything, then you have to do something. But you don't think about it, it just happens. Then somebody does something and then somebody else does something. As you go on somebody builds the boat, then you're sailing these waters. As you go on somebody builds the sail, and somebody else else makes a telescope. So finally you sight land." [from the film, Inside Out in the Open, by Alan Roth.

<<http://www.insideoutintheopen.net./home.html>>]

"I used to always practice one note. That's all I used to ever practice, one note all day. The idea of visualization. The idea of lakes of light, of cathedrals of light, of looking at the string as light. I developed a visualization concept that the string is a band of light. I didn't read this anywhere, I may have invented the idea. (I better patent this). The string is a band of light; the bow is a prism. When you put light--white light--through a prism, you get color. And that was the sound, that was the harmonics. These are the things that I love. The harmonics and the sound. I was never interested in the notes. I was only interested in the sound, the color, and the shapes of the colors.

"Then somehow I ran into the concept of healing and music. Then trying to relate certain sounds to certain ideas, and then projecting them out as I was playing to the audience. But this concept stagnated and fizzled out for now. It was too mental. So there was color, sound, healing. Then that developed into a no-note concept. You are not playing any notes on the bass. This is where the idea of the trap drum set came in--looking at the bass as a trap drum set. The G string is the ride cymbal: that's your pulse, that's your drone, that's your tamboura. I'm always playing in the key of G, I'm sorry, but that's the way it is. E, now that's your gong and your bass drum. The D

string is your snare. The A string is your low tomtom and also can act as your additional cymbals. So that was the visualization.... You are playing a total sound concept, just sound; tones are there, notes maybe there, but your not thinking in terms of Bb, Eb, etc." <http://www.signaltonoisemagazine.org/content/WPstn1.html>

[about his method of playing with Cecil Taylor] "The way they put music together, which is much the way a painter paints a painting. You have this pallet of sounds and then you put them together and you rearrange them and then you work with them and you set the things into motion. It comes an animated thing and takes on a life of itself and becomes alive. So that was very interesting, how the music was put together and the faith that one has in the players to interpret the music and the liberty that was given to allow the players to greet the music and put their own personalities into the music. It was never dictated. You have to play this way. It was a big chance, but when it worked, it really worked." <http://jazzweekly.com/interviews/wparker.htm>

Gary Peacock: Gary Peacock was on an intense spiritual journey when I first met him in Boston in the late 1960's. He subbed for me with a lounge lizard kind of piano trio. The other musicians loved him; his musical strength, power, and conviction. But I later heard that he preferred working as a bus boy in a local restaurant than doing the night club gigs around town. And I knew what he meant: indeed there was some sick karma in that commercial jazz scene [Voigt].

He has also taken his spiritual skills to better his music. Perhaps this technique of his might work for you. It comes from August 2001 Bass Player magazine. It's done totally without having your instrument in your hands. "I used a visualization technique. I'd lie down on my back, put my awareness in my toes, and then gradually move all the way up my body to the head. If I met some tension and acknowledged it, it would leave by itself. At that point, I would visualize myself playing--it could be a scale, or a melody, or a bass line. I noticed that even in my imagination, I would become aware of tension arising somewhere in my neck. I'd let go of the tension, and then I'd 'play' again faster, and faster, and faster."

Sun Ra: "There are about a thousand ways to play a single note." [The Great Jazz Pianists]. James Spaulding (saxophonist/educator) commenting on what he learned from playing with Sun Ra: "To play this music, each musician must be closely empathic with each other to avoid making strange sounds unrelated to the music." Marshall Allen said: "He would tell us to practice and duplicate the sounds of electronic drums. He wanted us to take the saxophone and sound like the violin, or sound like a trumpet, to sound like everything--a saxophone plus. He knew the electronic age was coming in [so also] duplicate all this electronics." <http://jazzweekly.com/interviews/allen.htm>

The Sound Image, [written by Sun Ra]: That's what the music says, that is how I say the music... The music is a journey, the journey is endless It is sound endlessness communication language point. Endless sound is universal language because that is what music is Equations bridge across the bridgeless-bottomless world of sound That is what the music is, the universal language The bridge-communication sound. There is no other way to speak to everyone in language each can Feel and understand except through the music. How can you speak to other worlds except through the music? The music lets them know, where you are at and what you are. If you are pure, the music's pure.

The music is your testing ground, it is your choice that tells the tale, When all else fails. Pure music is what you must face. If you limit, if you reject, if you do not consider If you are selfish-earthly bound, Pure music is your nemesis. You cannot pretend: you will accept or you will reject. There is no middle ground.

The mirror of pure music is a negative field/feel that photographs The image-mind-impression soul and psychic-self even the potential immediate alter-destiny/destinies.

The music is the image is the music is the image The sound image. The living image of sound.....Image
Sound of the Cosmo-World approach journey. The waves of sound are like waves of water in the ocean There is a tide and time of sound

[from the Trudy Morse collection at the Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University, Newark.]

More wisdom from the man from outer space at Planet Sun Ra

<http://www.holeworld.com/stellar.html>

Also check out Saturn Web: Sun Ra, The Arkestra

<http://www.dpo.uab.edu/~moudry/>

And if you're ready to really enter his head space go to an interview

conducted by Jennifer Rycenga and edited by Dan Plonsey at

<http://www.plonsey.com/beanbenders/SUNRA-interview.html>

Dewey Redman: Question: What is your maxim in music? Redman's answer, "When I play, what I am playing, the first thing I reach for is sound. If I get a good sound I'm well on my way." [F. Lamouroux, jazzine.com]

Marc Ribot: Fred Jung: What is the biggest misconception of free jazz?

Marc Ribot: "I think the misconception is when people think free jazz, they think it means people doing, just a bunch of dudes blowing their brains out and doing what they want to do, which it is, or which it can be, but really, it was people confronting a specific problem, which is they wanted to get

beyond what had become the formulaic rules of bebop and finding different compositional answers. Yes, people improvise very intensely, but they improvise within a set of rules. I think that the public at large, when they hear the words free jazz, don't associate it with sets of rules. The sets of rules for Ornette's harmolodic music, I mean, I haven't actually studied with Ornette, but it's clear that it is based on taking motifs and freeing it up to become polytonal, melodically and rhythmically, it is tied very strongly to the motifs in the head. That's what it's about. That's what you listen for. That's what I listen for when I listen to it. It was a brilliant solution because it enabled the music to get, was able to if it needed to, get really dense, but at the same time, it could remain true to maybe just a blues riff. In fact, some of the tunes seemed to deconstruct, maybe I'm completely out to lunch so to speak, but I could swear that is taking apart a Sonny Stitt tune, or maybe that's a Gene Ammons' tune, I think, but anyway, but treating it harmolodically enabled it to go to a lot of other places. It opened up the language while staying true to where the language was from. That's the exact same thing as saying, 'Hey, man, let's smoke a joint and party.' Mind you, people may very well also have smoked a joint and partied, but I wouldn't know."

<http://jazzweekly.com/interviews/ribot.htm>

Jay Rosen: You never know when your music is being heard by someone and when it grants them an epiphany. On a gig with Jay Rosen and the master saxophonist Zane Massey, Jay told me about listening to Khan Jamal, Moondoc, Andrew Cyrille, and me and this led to him playing what he called a "magical concert...a very spiritual experience...totally absorbed." Nothing could be a higher compliment coming from such a master drummer on the New York scene. The following comes from a **Cadence** Interview April, 2002. It is about his studying with **Barry Altschul:**

"He was different from any other drum teacher I'd had up to that time. Instead of dealing with basic necessities of a person learning to play the instrument, his emphasis was more of a conceptual model. He gave that to me. He took out a piece of graph paper, and drew two lines on it, that started out kind of adjacent to each other. And then he started going off, improvising with the lines, and getting into these bizarre, geometrical shapes. After he was done, he gave me the sheet of paper, along with another paper of home exercises to work on. He really didn't explain it. I asked him what it was, and he told me, 'Don't worry about it. It' will all fall into place.' I was so impressed with his musicianship that I just went with it.

"He gave me certain exercises to do, like marching in front of a mirror with a snare drum, moving my arms and legs up and down, as if I was in a marching band. Another exercise was for me to make a sound on the drumset, then make another sound, then another sound, and so on. That really opened me up, that one thing. I went back to the next lesson and asked him to describe that exercise in greater detail. And he showed me what was possible on the drumset, with the rims, the

skins, the sides of the cymbals, the sides of the shells of the drums themselves, with your hands, with brushes, mallets....I became acutely aware of the vast amount of sounds, and orchestral devices, that could be utilized on the instrument. That really opened my eyes.

Cadence: "What was the idea behind marching in front of the mirror?"

"I think he was looking at it from a spiritual angle. He was thinking about form, awareness, being one with oneself at the drumset. He was always looking for a higher plane in playing music, and I think that was a form of meditation for him.

"I use my ears as the final judge of not only what I play, but how much I play, and at what volume and density. One thing that Barry left me with, that has been of lasting value, is to check your ego at the door--get the ego out of the way, and serve the music, do what is appropriate. I'm not interested in showing people how 'well' I can play."

Roswell Rudd: This comes from Alan Roth's film, **Inside Out in the Open**: "You have to be very studied, very disciplined, very knowledgeable with the elements of theory to get to this kind of freedom. First a knowledge of the tempered system, chord progressions, chord theory, tonality, and atonality, etc. When you go into the other part of it, beyond the system into world rhythms, lack of tonality, improvisation--live composition--regardless of the system, it's the stuff that performances are made of."

Archie Shepp: "Negro music is not limited to a polyrhythmic beat. It can be polymetric. In fact it started out that way." [[Jazz Forum](#) 2.1985]

Alan Silva: [what follows is my translation from the French web site <http://www.jazzbank.com/musicien/IACPdoc.html> about Silva's school in Paris]

Alan Silva helped found, direct and teach at the Institut Art Culture Perception in Paris from 1975 to 1987.

His teaching methods were based on listening, concentrating, and visualizing "Musical Perception." Which is Objective Listening: amplitude, frequencies, rate/rhythm, sound mass and structure. And Subjective Listening: emotions, judgements, personal feelings and memories, and awareness of the physical body.

Listening took place in an obsessional way, often in a darkened space lit by less than a 5 watt bulb, or by ultraviolet rays. The separate elements of listening were isolated and examined. These programs contained a variety of musical styles: ethnic, electroacoustic, jazz, rock, classical, and improvised music. This preserved a certain freshness in listening. Intensive musical perception opened the ears of the student listener/musician, (or it did not).

Instrumental Improvisational Pedagogy. Silva was inspired by the people he played with: Cecil Taylor, Sun Ra, Bill Dixon. But also by the scientific/mathematical study of frequency curves, the propagation of the sound, the permutations in the music, the methods of musical variation and composition. This approach freed the student of the stylistic constraints imposed by traditional harmonic systems such as classical music harmony, or the established chord changes of songs played in mainstream jazz. The stress is laid on the horizontal melody and its permutations, on the construction of an expressive improvisation in time. Instrumental technique existed to serve the musical development. Students who had a solid background in more traditional instrumental and harmonic studies benefited most by Silva's teaching methods. Expression and creativity are missing in most traditional academic institutions. In a sense the I.A.C.P. filled this vacuum. But the I.A.C.P. with its own dogmatic vision created another teaching gap. Especially there was not enough rigorous and powerful study of Rhythm. But pupils at the end of the school year were playing on the [Paris] scene, and this was justifying.

[this comes from Eric Zinman: "I once saw Alan Silva speak at the New England Conservatory. He discussed his early interests in visual art and science. He spoke about a device he created which would produce colors on a wall in reaction to the music that was played by ensembles he was coaching at his school in Paris. The ensemble could view the screen while they were playing. If the musicians played the same sounds the device would respond by producing the same color as if the musicians were seeing themselves in a mirror enabling them to have something beautiful with which to study themselves.....perhaps gain some insight."]

A lovely discography of Silva is at <http://www.mindspring.com/~scala/silva.html>.

Wadada Leo Smith: "I solved (the problem making music more complicated than it needs to be) by breaking down the components. For example, my music consists of long and short sounds. Essentially, those are the two moving forces, long and short. The long sound can be long or longer if it can be extended and the short sound can be short or shorter, so that eliminated a lot of problems. It allowed an ensemble of creative musicians to actually trust what they were going to add to it, but this trust became part of the musical design. When it is broken down into the smallest components in the sonic areas, in the horizontal areas, in the vertical areas. I looked at rhythm and I thought that rhythm also suffered the same problems. When I scoped the world and began to see what rhythm was, I found out that there was only two kinds of rhythm. There is odd and even. Rather than say that let's play in a 29/37/8, I don't have to do that. What I do is make a rhythmic equation and out of that rhythmic equation, all those possibilities could exist depending upon the skill and the level in which the language is used by the person that is performing it."

Fred Jung: "You make it almost sound scientific."

Wadada Leo Smith: "Well, it is scientific in the sense that day and night is scientific, but one cannot say that they are like mechanically evolving. One can say that they happen as part of the same stream. It is a science. Music is a science. A perfect octave sounds a certain way. Those things are regulated by the turning and revolving of the axis of every planet in our system, including mankind." <http://jazzweekly.com/interviews/wlsmith.htm>

Wadada Leo Smith has a lovely site at <http://shoko.calarts.edu/~wls/>

Cecil Taylor: "If you take the creation of a music and the creation of your own life values as your overall goal, then living becomes a musical process. It becomes a search to absorb everything that happens to you and to incorporate it into the music....There is no music without order--if that music comes from a man's innards. But that order is not necessarily related to any single criterion of what order should be as imposed from the outside. Whether that criterion is the song form or what some critic thinks jazz should be. This is not a question of 'freedom' as opposed to 'nonfreedom' but rather it is a question of recognizing different ideas and expressions of order." [Liner notes to Conquistador]

"When everything is determined, that's all prison cells." Cadence Dec. 1984.

Bassist Buell Neidlinger who shared an apartment with Taylor said: "His practice revolves around solfege singing. He'll sing a phrase and then he'll harmonize it at the piano and then he'll sing it again, always striving to get the piano to sing, to try and match this feeling of the human production, the voice...Cecil's trying to get the vocal sound out of the piano, and I think he's achieved it on many occasions. You can almost hear the piano scream or cry." [A.B. Spellman. Four Lives in the Bebop Business]

"Creating music as sound within the whole body; which must be brought to [a] level of total de-personalized realization." [Cecil Taylor, Aqoueh R-Oyo.]

"Action playing. The eye looks, mind deciphers, hands attack, ear informs. An ear having heard identifies. *Hearing is sight face away from academy's superfluity*. There are no separate parts: one body and the mind enclosed we procede inventing." [notes from Unit Structures].

Taylor: "I try to imitate on piano the leaps in space a dancer makes." [A.B. Spellman]

"Form is possibility....Rhythm-sound energy found in the amplitude of each time unit....Would then define the pelvis as cathartic region prime undulation, ultimate communion, internal while life is becoming, visible physical conversation between all body's limbs: Rhythm is life the space of time danced thru." [Liner notes to Unit Structures]

[Taylor on Technique] "It doesn't matter where your technique comes from, or whether it is 'correct' or not. It will be correct if your music is strong."
[Spellman].

[a paraphrase] Taylor: "If you criticize Thelonious Monk for a supposed lack of technique, you're revealing your own cultural bias." [Contemporary Keyboard May, 1981]

[On his Compositional Process] "Mr. Taylor's compositional process is to give you the pitches. You internalize the rhythm after he plays it several times, and he tells you he wants you in this section but not in that one. Bounds and parameters are not defined by time, but by feeling, idea, and awareness of his personality." Joseph Jarman, Liner notes to Art Ensemble of Chicago's recording Thelonius Sphere Monk.

"He employs a considerable amount of notation--consisting of letter names of pitches written on staffless paper, each letter placed higher or lower on the page to indicate melodic direction." [from Mark Bobak's magnificent PhD thesis at U. Illinois at Urbana "The Music of Cecil Taylor."

Cecil Taylor (when teaching at New England Conservatory) would bring in scores to see how people would react to them. I remember he gave a series of letters lined vertically and horizontally and told three horn players to play as he stood on a chair over them and listened, then he went home and rewrote the piece. In his NEC ensemble he had four electric guitarists all enamoured of their picks playing scratchy glissandos. Taylor listened carefully--let's say it wasn't the nicest sound ever made--but he let them do their thing. "Ligetti," he finally remarked to himself, and later created a section where they would play these scratchy sound glissandos between certain pitches in contrary motion cross voicing each other; while several horns played c# unison on the g clef and spread out 3 half steps in either direction slowly in long durations while the piano played something else.
[Eric Zinman]

Taylor often writes music by putting note letter names in columns. But understand that for Taylor the interval between the notes (say the major third between a C and E) is more important than just playing the notes themselves. [Voigt]

Taylor on **Physical Movement**: [more from Mark Bobak's magnificent PhD thesis at U. Illinois at Urbana The Music of Cecil Taylor] "Taylor's interest in movement and physicality is mentioned in numerous sources. Probably his most frequent quoted statement concerns his supposedly trying to 'imitate on the piano the leaps in space a dancer makes.' Taylor admits to being 'very conscious of body movement' when he plays, adding that 'one's actions onstage and the music are inseparable.'" Hence he seems to consider physical movement as intrinsic to his work, recalling that listeners 'used to snicker at Monk when he got up and danced during his numbers, but what he was doing was simply a natural extension of his music. My motions are the same.' During the preparation of a piece in a workshop session with

student musicians, Taylor told them 'First you have to lose your inhibitions, and one way you do that is by starting to move.'

Taylor on the **Spiritual Aspect** of the Music: "I currently view the presentation of music from a very ritualistic point of view. The voice, the chanting, the poems and the movement are all things that I have been working on throughout my whole career." "The determining agent of [my] music has to do with ancestor worship; it has to do with a lot of areas that are magical rather than logical....I try to deal with states beyond consciousness, with the element of chance, the element of magic....I'm in a state of trance when I play....playing is not a question of energy. It's spiritual transfiguration....Music is one of the manifestations of God. To me, it is the force of nature which is what the sound is--the eternal sound. The beauty of whatever made those trees, those stones, the rivers...that is the living force that I am concerned with."

[continuing these themes, from the 1975 interview in Aqoueh R-Oyo: "Most people don't have any idea of what improvisation is...It means the magical lifting of one's spirits to a state of trance. It means the most heightened perception of one's self, but one's self in a relationship to other forms of life which people talk about as the universe. It means experiencing oneself as another kind of living organism much in the way of a plant, a tree--the growth, that's what it is. And at the same time, when one attains separate parts: one body and the mind enclosed. We proceed inventing."

[Taylor questions the apparent separations between feeling and thinking, between emotions and intellect--the stuff of a European based music curriculum. More from Aqoueh R-Oyo:] "Creating Music as sound within the whole body; which must be brought to a level of total depersonalized realization....'They' have divided the body/treating the mind as divine agent/emotion must be controlled/to achieve 'purity.' Stimuli has/become to the extent a musical translation/for its continuance (life)--an/external; vicarious attempt to/revivify atrophied methods thru/gratuitous conceits mausoleum./Ask the body universe to divide./eyes translate the note/(not seeing to become an ear)/body then has become separated/from what first exists to itself/in the function diurnal nature/the primacy spirit is within."

David S. Ware: One of the most important learning experiences I ever had happened right before I was to play at the 2000 Vision Festival in New York City. David S. Ware was playing a solo set right before we were to go on. Ware was fantastic! Better than any recording I had ever heard him on. He was dressed in African-like ceremonial garb and he was in a trance state. And that state and his music coming from that place mesmerized the audience. Everyone was spiritually high, totally stoned. I brought my bass past him as I set up to play--he looked like he was coming back from outer space: re-adjusting to this worldly sphere. [Voigt].

The following is from the Wire, #180: "Music, in my mind, comes from the Source. From silence to music. It comes up through all the dimensions and

into this reality where we hear it. Actually in reality what's happening is that the music that we play--this is my construct, what I think is happening, how it is set up--it comes from a storehouse of music. In other words there is some place in the universe, some reality somewhere, some dimension, all melody, all harmony, all color exists. If you can imagine all the music that's ever been played in human history comes from that [and] it's happening at the same time continuously, all the time. In the universal storehouse of music all music is happening all the time."

A WNUR interview from 1996 may be found at <http://www.northwestern.edu/jazz/artists/ware.david/interview.html> A Jazz Dimensions interview is at http://www.jazzdimensions.de/interviews/portraits/david_s_ware.html

P.S. from Voigt: I am interested in how to musically develop the thing you start with, for example the motive (or whatever). I asked some friends and got some great practical ideas. (Send me your suggestions too.) Eve Packer: "Be as a channel, a river." Matt Samolis: "It depends on what you choose to work from." Jon Damian: "Repetition. As a cell developing into a human being. Or a photographic film developed." Tom Plsek: "Growth coming from a source. Choice of procedures, choice of instruments, motives. Bill Elgart: "Personal survival." Aldo Tambellini: "Evolution within the human being. Then it should enter into a relationship with the whole society."

Things To Come: Check back in this web site. In the future I plan to add transcribed solos, more links to free jazz, free improvisation, and related sites. Maybe audio-clips. I am open to suggestions. Let me know your thoughts. We are the champions of a musical (spiritual) truth that must be known to those who can really have the ears to hear. It is up to all of us to get the message out.