An incomplete timeline on the struggle of Black Creative Musicians
This timeline and accompanying collage is an ongoing process to chronicle and highlight the struggle for equity for black artists playing their own free music, while illuminating some of the forces which require artists to take matters into their own hands.

This timeline is not complete. We invite collaboration on this project to help document the legacy and ongoing work around Free Jazz and related arts—and anything else we may have missed—in the years to come.

This pamphlet produced by Arts for Art for the Legacies of Black Creative Music - A Path Towards Justice conference held at The Clemente Flamboyan Theater on June 20, 2022 as part of the 26th Vision Festival.

Front and back cover collages by Kehinde Alonge.
An incomplete timeline of the struggle of Black Creative Musicians

1910s
- **1910, Harlem, NY**: James Reese Europe and Will Marion Cook founded Clef Club, a labor union and booking agency for black performers.¹

1920s
- **1921, California**: Sunshine Record Company was formed by Johnny and Red Spikes.²
- **1921, Harlem, NY**: Black Swan Records founded in 1921 by Harry Pace. This is the first record company to be fully owned, operated, and marketed to African Americans.³
- **May 23, 1921, New York, NY**: *Shuffle Along*, the first all-black hit Broadway performance, premiered, with music by jazz pianist Eubie Blake and lyrics by Noble Sissle.⁴
- **1927**: Pope Pius XI called jazz “discordant cacophony, arrhythmic howls and wild cries.” ⁵

1930s
- **1936**: Cornetist Nick LaRocca, leader of the *Original Dixieland Jazz Band*, stated in *Tempo* magazine: “Our music is strictly white man’s music. My contention is that the Negroes learned to play this rhythm and music from the whites... The Negro did not play any kind of music equal to white men at any time.”⁶ Later in his life, LaRocca claimed to have invented jazz and claimed to be the “Christopher Columbus of music.”⁷

1940s
- **1940, Los Angeles, CA**: Bronze Records is formed by Leroy Hurte.⁸
- **During the Cold War**, the United States sponsored tours of

---

5. Horne, *Jazz & Justice*, 1
6. Ashby, *With Amusement For All*, 207
7. Michael Patrick Welch, “Jazz’s Great White Hype” *Narratively*
jazz musicians, particularly Dizzy Gillespie and Louis Armstrong, to promote an image of a racially harmonious America, amidst Soviet propaganda speaking to the contrary.9

1950s

- 1952, Detroit, MI: Dizzy Gillespie founded Dee Gee record label.10
- Summer of 1955, New York, NY: Gigi Gryce started Melotone Music, his own music publishing company, “to handle rights and royalties for his compositions as well as the works of other jazz composers.”11 (Cohen, Fitzgerald 165).
- 1957, Chicago, IL: Sun Ra and Altan Abraham founded El Saturn Records to release Sun Ra’s music.12
- October 1959, New York, NY: Jazz for Civil Rights benefit concert takes place, featuring Miles Davis, Art Blakey, Kenny Burrell, Horace Silver, and more. The event occurred at Manhattan’s Hunter College.13

1960s

- July 2nd, 1960: Rochester, NY: Charles Mingus & Max Roach organized Newport Rebels festival to protest the hiring practices of the Newport Jazz Festival.14
- 1961, Los Angeles, California: Horace Tapscott founded the musicians collective Union of God’s Musicians and Artists Ascension (UGMAA).15
- 1961, New York, NY: Trumpeter Joe Newman helped found Jazz Interactions to “stimulate a greater awareness of jazz by providing jazz information and educational services in the New York metropolitan area.” According to Newman, Jazz Interactions was the first jazz organization to be funded by a grant.16
- “In 1963, Secretary of Commerce Luther H. Hodges confirmed that music, and especially jazz, had played an integral role in every

9. Anderson, This is Our Music, 43-48
10. Heller, Loft Jazz, 20
11. Cohen, Fitzgerald, Rat Race Blues, 165
13. Horne, Jazz & Justice, 253
14. Heller, Loft Jazz, 20
15. Heller, Loft Jazz, 23
American Trade exhibition since the mid-1950s. He calculated that U.S. officials had piped jazz into pavilions at more than one hundred international trade fairs on both sides of the Iron Curtain.”

- **1962, New York, NY:** John Dent, with Amiri Baraka, helped form the Umbra Writers’ Workshop, a collective of activists, writers and artisans. The group focused primarily on performance-based arts, and included artists Archie Shepp, Ishmael Reed, David Henderson, and more.

- **January 16th, 1963, New York, NY:** Saxophonist Gigi Gryce is slowly forced to withdraw from the publishing industry after receiving threats that left Gryce paranoid, according to Reggie Workman. His family faced harassment and intimidation.

- **May 1963:** In a Downbeat article, Baraka noted the rise of coffee shops and lofts appearing in the Greenwich Village and the Lower East Side as alternatives to standard jazz clubs.

- **March 28, 1963, Washington, DC:** Martin Luther King Jr. leads the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

- **1964, New York, NY:** Jazzmobile, Inc. was founded by Daphne Arnstein and Dr. Billy Taylor to “present, preserve, promote and propagate America’s classical music, Jazz.” This organization is still active today.

- **October 1 & 4, 1964, New York, NY:** Bill Dixon hosted and organized October Revolution festival at the Cellar Cafe.

- **1964, New York, NY:** Jazz Composers Guild is formed and organized by Paul and Carla Bley, Sun Ra, Bill Dixon, and more. Their mission, abridged here, was to “establish the music in its rightful place in society; to awaken the musical consciousness of the masses of people...; (and) to provide facilities for the proper creation, rehearsal, performance, and dissemination of the music.”

- **February 21, 1965, New York, NY:** Malcolm X is assassinated.

- **1965, New York, NY:** After the assassination of Malcom X, Amiri Baraka opened the Black Arts Repertory Theater (BART) in Harlem, formally establishing The Black Arts Movement. BART hosted concerts, political education panels, and more.

17. Anderson, *This is Our Music*, 41
22. Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 279
23. Such, *Avant-Garde Jazz Musicians*, 83
The FBI closely monitored BART’s activities from its inception, with documentation for June 2nd through September 21, 1965.\textsuperscript{25}

- **August 5, 1965, Chicago, IL:** Muhal Richard Abrams, Jodie Christian, Steve McCall, and Sandra Lashley incorporated the Association of the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) with the City of Chicago.\textsuperscript{26} (Lewis 114).

- **Wadada Leo Smith:** “During the ‘60s in Chicago, policemen were even planted as musicians to observe our habits and practices in the AACM. They actually played instruments. They infiltrated and were part of our organization for about half a year. They observed everything about the group and made their report to Mayor Daly and his task team. One of our secretaries ran into one of them in uniform about a year later and the guy actually admitted that they were investigating what we were doing.”\textsuperscript{27}

- **1966, New York, NY:** Milford Graves and Don Pullen founded record label SRP, short for Self-Reliance Project. The label released Graves and Pullen’s two duo records, *In Concert at Yale University* and *Nonmo*.

- **1966:** Downbeat hosted a panel discussing “the social and economic problems confronting young negro jazzmen in the United States.” Panelists include Cecil Taylor, Cannonball Adderly, Sunny Murray, Archie Shepp, Roland Kirk, club owner Art D’Lugoff, and Dan Morgenstern. Cecil Taylor: “Negro musicians boycott the club. Negro musicians boycott the record companies. Negro musicians boycott all journals dealing with music. Negro musicians resign from 802. Because I’m not interested in having a social discussion with you about the rights and wrongs of something your power will never allow me—as long as the status quo remains—to right that wrong, because you have the power to decide what is right and wrong.”\textsuperscript{28}

- **1967, Staten Island, NY:** Maurice Phillips founded the University Temple of the Arts (UTA). The organization “pioneered as one of the first not-for-profit organizations of its kind to serve as a resource and platform for artists of color and the community from a multicultural perspective.”\textsuperscript{29}

- **October 15, 1966, Oakland, CA:** The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was formed.


\textsuperscript{26} Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, 114

\textsuperscript{27} Peterson, *Music and the Creative Spirit*, 273

\textsuperscript{28} “Point of Contact: A Discussion,” *Downbeat*, 11th Yearbook (1966), 19-21, 24-26, 29, 30-31, 111

\textsuperscript{29} University Temple of the Arts
- **July 1968, St. Louis, MO:** Shortly after a performance of “The Blacks” by playwright Jean Genet, the multidisciplinary Black Artists Group (BAG) is formed. Julius Hemphill served as chairman, Malinke Elliot as executive and artistic director, and Oliver Lake served as treasurer.\(^{30}\)

- **1968, New York, NY:** Carla Bley and Michael Mantler founded JCOA Records to distribute the music of the Jazz Composers Orchestra Association. The label featured Grachan Moncur III, Leroy Jenkins, Don Cherry, Roswell Rudd, and more leading the Jazz Composers Orchestra.

- **1968, Deer Park, NY:** Alice Coltrane started the “Coltrane” record label.

- **Late 1969, New York, NY:** Studio We is founded by trumpeter James DuBoise after inheriting the loft from pianist Burton Greene who was away in Europe.\(^{31}\)

- **July 3-5, 1969, New York, NY:** Studio We hosted three day festival *Three Days of Peace Between the Ears*. The festival featured performances by groups led by Sam Rivers, Rashied Ali, and more.\(^{32}\)

- **September 1969:** Signs that BAG would eventually lose grant support emerge. “The Rockefeller Foundation’s Norman Lloyd listed a number of concerns voiced by Danforth Foundation president Merrimon Cuninggim: ‘The program has tended to exacerbate white-black relations and increase rather than diminish tension.’”\(^{33}\)

- **1969, Brooklyn, NY:** Black cultural organization The East is founded in Bedford-Stuyvesant. The organization hosted performances by Pharaoh Sanders, Cecil Taylor, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Billy Hart, and more.\(^{34}\)

### 1970s

- **1970, New York, NY:** Ornette Coleman opened up his loft on 131 Prince Street in SoHo, Artist House, to host performances. Coleman also allowed other musicians to produce their own concerts.\(^{35}\)

- **August 27, 1970:** The Jazz and Peoples Movement, led by Rahsaan Roland Kirk, interrupted a taping of the *Merv Griffin Show* to demand more jazz and black music on television. This protest even-

---

tually led to an *Ed Sullivan Show* appearance where Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Charles McGhee, Dick Griffin, Archie Shepp, Charles Mingus, Roy Haynes, and others performed Mingus’s *Haitian Fight Song.*

- **1971, New York, NY:** Charles Tolliver and Stanley Cowell founded record label Strata East. The label released the music of Pharoah Sanders, Clifford Jordan, Gil Scott-Heron, and more.

- **1971:** Congress approved a $15 million dollar budget for the National Endowment for the Arts for the upcoming fiscal year. $3.5 million is allocated towards symphony orchestras. $50,000 is allocated to jazz. 

- **March 1971:** The Black Artists for Community Action (comprised of Archie Shepp, Beaver Harris, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Roswell Rudd, and others) organized a play-in at the Guggenheim New York office in response to the Guggenheim’s refusal to allocate $1 million for African American writers and performers, and honorary awards for elder statesmen in the black arts.

- **1971, New Haven CT:** Wadada Leo Smith founded record label Ka-bell Records to release his music.

- **Spring 1972, St. Louis, MO:** BAG disbanded.

- **July 9-19 1972, New York, NY:** New York Musicians Organization hosted the *New York Musicians’ Jazz Festival* to protest the relocation of the *Newport Jazz Festival* to New York City. The counter festival proved more prolific than Newport, hosting over 250 performances over 11 days.

- **1972, Bronx, NY:** Ben Caldwell opened up Third World Cultural Center, a community space hosting plays, arts, music, and poetry on 167th Street and Park Avenue.

- **July 1972:** Sam Rivers began hosting regular concerts, workshops, and jam sessions at his loft, Studio Rivbea.

- **1972, New York, NY:** Mike Mahaffay opened loft Sunrise Studio for performances.

- **1973, Bronx, NY:** Bronx Poetry Workshop, organized by George Edward Tait, presents poetry and concerts.

---

36. Backus, *Fire Music,* 79-83
38. Anderson, *This is Our Music,* 178-179
39. Looker, *BAG: Point from which creation begins,* 193
40. Heller, *Loft Jazz,* 45-46
42. Heller, *Loft Jazz,* 50
43. “Lower East Side - Historical District for Free Jazz”
• **1973, New York, NY:** Rashied Ali opened up Ali’s Alley loft for performances.45

• **December 28, 1973:** Richard Nixon signed the “Comprehensive Employment and Training Act” (CETA). For the next 7 years, more than 20,000 artists and art support staff received full-time employment.46

• **1974:** Oliver Lake founded record label Passin Thru to release his own music. This label released music by Pheroan akLaff, Trio 3, Ken McIntyre and more.

• **1973:** Rashied Ali founded record label Survival to release his own music.

• **1975, New York, NY:** Charles Tyler founded Ak-Ba record label. The label released music by Tyler, Cecil McBee, Arthur Doyle, and more.

• **1976:** Steve Reid founded record label Mustevic Sound Inc., which released the “Nova” LP, along with other records.

• **1977:** Sunrise Studio closed.47

• **1978:** Decline in jazz lofts as rents rise in lower Manhattan.48

• **1973:** Cecil Taylor founded Unit Core record label, which released his albums “Indent” and “Spring of Two Blue-J’s”.

• **March 1977, New Haven, CT:** The Creative Musicians Improvisors Forum is founded by Wadada Leo Smith, Bobby Naughton, Dwight Andrews, Wes Brown, and Gerry Hemingway. The organization promoted the work of its musicians, provided education services, and more.49

• **1979, New York, NY:** Community space Charas/El Bohio opened, which included studios for musicians such as Jemeel Moondoc and Butch Morris.50

### 1980s

• **1980, New York, NY:** Ali’s Alley closed.51

• **1981, New York, NY:** William Parker founded publishing company Centering Records. The company has released music by William Parker, Cooper-Moore, and more.

---

45. Heller, *Loft Jazz*, 50
47. “Lower East Side - Historical District for Free Jazz”
50. “Lower East Side - Historical District for Free Jazz”
51. “Lower East Side - Historical District for Free Jazz”
• 1982: New Artist Records is founded by Connie Crothers and Max Roach, an independent label run by a collective of musicians.52

• 1983, New York, NY: AACM establishes New York Chapter. 53

• June 1–3, 1984, New York, NY: William Parker, Patricia Nicholson Parker, and Peter Kowald organize the first Sound Unity Festival at Cuando Community Center on 2nd Ave and First St..54

• June 30, 1985, New York, NY: William Parker, Butch Morris, Jemeel Moondoc, and Billy Bang organize the Lower East Side Jazz Festival at CUANDO Community Center.55

• 1985, Brooklyn, NY: Lester Bowie, Oliver Lake, and Cecil Taylor founded Musicians of Brooklyn Initiative (MOBI) with the intention of “increasing the public’s awareness of America’s indigenous music and developing greater appreciation for regional musicians by presenting the works of known and unknown artists alike.”56

• April 13–17, 1987, New York, NY: William Parker, Patricia Nicholson Parker, and Peter Kowald organize the second Sound Unity Festival at The Knitting Factory and Kraine Club.57

1990s

• 1992: Yusef Lateef founded record label YAL Records to release his own music.

• December 1993, New York, NY: Patricia Nicholson Parker brings together musicians, dancers, poets, and visual artists to form the Improvisors Collective. This group held weekly concerts at Context Studios on Avenue A.58

• 1995: Performance venue and cultural center, Sistas’ Place’s where Jazz: A Music of the Spirit lives and Culture is our Weapon, opened, co-founded by Ahmed Abdullah.59

• June 5-9, 1996, New York, NY: Patricia Nicholson Parker organized the First Annual Vision Festival, subsequently leading to the founding of Arts for Art.

52. New Artists, https://www.newartistsrecords.com/about
53. AACM New York, “http://aacm-newyork.net/about.htm
54. “Lower East Side - Historical District for Free Jazz”
55. “Lower East Side - Historical District for Free Jazz”
56. Such, “Avant-Garde Jazz Musicians,” 84
57. “Lower East Side - Historical District for Free Jazz
58. “Lower East Side - Historical District for Free Jazz
2000s

- **September 2001, New York, NY:** Arts for Art organized at the community center, CUANDO, 9 Second Ave, a 2 month long response to 9/11 called *From the Ashes* with a coalition of art groups and individuals including Dixon Place, John Zorn, Roulette, and more. The shows featured 100 visual artists and over 100 performers.  

- **2006:** Reggie Workman co-founded and co-produced the artist-driven Sculptured Sounds Music Festival (An artist-driven festival of futuristic concepts in music).

- **2006, New York, NY:** The *10th Vision Festival* begins issuing the LifeTime Achievement Award with Fred Anderson being the first to be so honored. Subsequent iterations of the Vision Festival honor legends with the Lifetime Achievement Award.

- **2007:** Performance venue The Tonic closed and Rise Up Creative Music and Arts (RUCMA) was formed to advocate and address the need for an artist-run performance space.

- **January 2008, New York, NY:** Arts for Art begins its education program.

2000s

- **2010, Washington, DC:** Luke Stewart and Giovanni Russonello formed jazz advocacy organization Capital Bob. The organization presents concerts, centralizes information about other jazz events in the area, and more. The organization is “dedicated to preserving, promoting and presenting jazz in Washington, D.C.”

- **2017:** Arts for Art starts “Artists for a Free World”, primarily functioning as a marching band with 50 demonstrations to date.

- **2018:** The Collective “We Have Voice” is formed by Fay Victor, Jen Shyu, Kavita Shah, Linda May Han Oh, Nicole Mitchell, and several others with the objective of creating initiatives to enrich the performing arts community and to bring awareness to various manifestations of inequity.

62. “Lower East Side - Historical District for Free Jazz”
64. Michael J. West, “How a flagging nonprofit D.C. jazz advocacy group picked up its tempo,” *The Washington Post*
66. *We Have Voice*, https://too-many.org
THE JAZZ SCENE
THE END TO JAZZ CLUBS?

When Cecil Taylor spoke at a panel discussion at the University of Michigan, it was clear to his intrepid audience that he had his finger on one of the most vital issues of the day. He was no longer willing to undergo the same kind of experience of being complacent about jazz. How much the musicians want to put to death the institution of jazz has been going to last much longer.

The image illustrates the prosperity of white middle-class American jazz, particularly the changes that occur in the last quarter of the decade. This is due to the fact that the jazz industry has the money to implement new ideas. You can see how the changes in the 1960s have led to a new generation of artists, who are more open to the world and create new forms of expression. This is because the jazz industry has the money to keep its artists alive, so as far as its purpose is concerned, it is creating a new generation of jazz artists.

Such innovations would be impossible if the jazz industry were still dominated by the old guard of established players, but it is a new trend that is developing and it is not likely to disappear in the near future. The business of jazz has always been under the influence of the politics and the economics of the society, but in the 1960s, the situation is changing. The business of jazz is not only about making money, but it is also about making a statement. It is a business that is changing and it is not going to disappear in the near future.

CREATIVE MUSICIAN and leader of the forward forces in jazz Richard Abrams says his music is not for today—but for the future. "Our children will carry the song," he predicts. Listening intently at a workshop for Abrams’ experimental band, in seeming formation of his prediction, is the composer 2-year-old daughter, Richarda.

archie shepp
MY RAGE

"Don't you ever wonder what my collective rage will be like, when it is—after forgiveness must be—unshakable?" the revolution

Jazz Since Watergate
Can The Musicians Take Care Of The Business

"Two new Watergate has become a

The Washington Post
a regular feature for MOON

Jazz Since Watergate
Can The Musicians Take Care Of The Business

Dollar Done
Brokedown

Can The Musicians Take Care Of The Business

Horace Tapscott
Conducts The Community Cultural Orchestra
in Concert
Concerts
2-7 p.m.
Nov. 19
Sunday
The Troubadour
801 W. Santa Monica CR-6-6168

New York Loft Scene

by Warren Finke

Who nearer of a very simple

\text{(Margaret Sullivan) New York Post April 19, 1978)\)