OLLY WILSON, ANTHONY DAVIS, AND GEORGE LEWIS: THE LIVES, WORKS, AND PERSPECTIVES OF THREE CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN COMPOSERS

D.M.A. DOCUMENT

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By

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ABSTRACT

The first part of this document explores the contributions made to music, research, and culture at large by three composers, Olly Wilson (b. 1937), Anthony Davis (b. 1951), and George Lewis (b. 1952). As all three of these composers are African Americans, their personal histories will be related to the larger history surrounding the development of music created and conceived by black people in America and the many issues that are brought to light in this music as compared to that of the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture in this country. In addition to determining a place in history for the three composers examined here, this document will also take on the implications their careers have for other African American composers as we enter the new millennium.

The second part of the document is the score of the author’s composition, *Reconstruction for Orchestra*. 
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In closing, I thank Olly Wilson, Anthony Davis, and George Lewis for their inspiration and for the awesome standard of excellence in their work and careers which I strive to emulate.
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_Courtsip Dances_ (1996)

_Three Events for Woodwind Quintet_ (1997)

_Reconstruction for Orchestra_ (1998)

_Fanfare for Dr. King_ (1998)

“New Someone” (1998)
Romance for Alto Saxophone and Piano (1999)

FIELDS OF STUDY

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"I am now satisfied that the future music of this country must be founded upon what are called the negro melodies. This must be a real foundation of any serious and original school of composition to be developed in the United States.

... These are the folk-songs of America, and your composers must turn to them. All of the great musicians have borrowed from the songs of the common people.

... In the negro melodies of America I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music. They are pathetic, tender, passionate, melancholy, solemn, religious, bold, merry, gay, or what you will."

As we examine the contributions of African American composers at the end of this century, we are led to the above assessment given by Antonin Dvorak regarding the future of American music at the end of the last. It may indeed be natural to expect such an embrace of folk elements from Dvorak (1841-1904), whose own compositional style was so thoroughly informed by the folk music of his native Bohemia. Yet, during his tenure as director of New York's National Conservatory of Music from 1892 to 1895, it was the potency and richness of music made by African Americans which eventually manifested itself in Dvorak's ninth symphony ("From The New World") and the "American" quartet (Op. 96).

In order to more fully understand the paths taken by contemporary African American composers Olly Wilson, Anthony Davis, and George Lewis, we must begin to understand

that potency and richness, and the circumstances which have fostered the evolution and flourishing of African American concert music over the past century. In doing so, we cannot ignore the social and cultural truths surrounding the presence of African people in America and the effects of these realities on the collective psyche of African Americans.

From the time of the arrival of the first slaves to North America in the fifteenth century, people of African descent have endured a hostile existence in this country. The mere nature of slavery alone validates this fact, but apart from that - and indeed, in part, because of it - there has been the constant proliferation of abuse, degradation, and legal mandates that have sought to brand all black people in America - slave and free - as inferior to members of the predominantly white ruling class. During slavery, this was achieved through the stripping of one's religious beliefs, cultural and family ties, and general sense of identity and self-esteem. Slaves were forced to abandon these ideals and bonds in favor of a world view in which the social and spiritual duty of the slave was to live in subordination to his/her white master, forsaking any desire to move beyond his/her captive state in acceptance of whatever limited freedom the master was willing to surrender.

As could be expected, the impact of this on the mental, emotional, and creative state of black people in America was profound to say the least. Although the personal ties to the African past were not easily purged or denied, nor were the new possibilities of the American present and future easily dismissed. Regardless of second-class-citizen status, many African Americans dreamed not so much of returning to Africa, but of building new dreams based on their American experience, no doubt encouraged by the handful of moderately successful free blacks and the ideas of some of the more optimistic abolitionists who were active prior to the Civil War (1861-1865). Still, there was no denying that in spite of the reception immigrants from other countries received upon arriving in America, people of African descent were not entirely welcome. The conclusion
drawn from this fact is best articulated in this passage by W.E.B. DuBois found in his landmark 1903 book, *The Souls of Black Folk*:

"After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself...through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."\(^2\)

DuBois characterizes this peculiar orientation as the "double-consciousness" of the African American and it serves as a cornerstone of the creative process of African American composers. On one level of consciousness, the black person in America feels a deep sense of attachment to his/her own heritage and the contributions which that heritage has made to humanity throughout history. It is a heritage of struggle, survival, evolution, and assimilation while in America that carries with it great pride with respect to the intellectual, social, and creative endeavors of black people springing from their American experiences. There is, however, a second level of consciousness thrust upon the African American. It recognizes the "amused contempt and pity" that the dominant population has had toward African American culture for generations, seeking to suppress its influence at almost every turn. It recognizes a dominant culture that in asserting its superiority, has sought to demean the intellectual, social, and creative endeavors of African Americans as well as African Americans themselves, through slavery and other legislative means of maintaining a racially and economically stratified social order. It realizes that the minority status of African Americans has often rendered any opportunity for collective

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advancement futile without the willful cooperation of members of the majority population, thereby limiting the ability of the African American to truly control his/her own destiny.

The concept of double consciousness as it pertains to music is all the more compounded by the fact that the aesthetic notions which define concert music in the European tradition and African and African American vernacular music are so polarized at the outset. While various aspects of African and African American styles and genres will be dealt with more thoroughly when discussing Olly Wilson’s and George Lewis’s research on the subject, it will now suffice to limit our scope of inquiry to the written tradition of European-derived concert music vis-à-vis the oral tradition of much African and African American music. Since the introduction of the earliest notation systems over 2000 years ago, the emphasis on and importance of writing out music in the European tradition has had a profound impact in every area of musical activity, from theoretical implications for tonality and scale temperament to performance practice to notions of overall form. However, as much as this literate orientation has done to help advance the art and preserve it for posterity, it has also thrust upon the tradition an image of music existing in a vacuum, not subject to the inevitable variabilities of the performance process. The score becomes a script to be strictly followed and thereby brought to life for the listener.

In contrast, the oral tradition of much African and African American music tends to accommodate those inevitable variabilities in that space is allotted for them in the music. Improvisation, deviations from pre-existing music, and instantaneously tailoring the music to suit the expectations of the audience are but three ways in which spontaneity plays a role in African-derived music. Whatever music does exist has often been passed down orally from generation to generation, leaving the authenticity of supposedly older forms and styles subject to debate. This leads to what some have considered to be fundamental weaknesses of African-derived music. The very nature of an oral tradition is highly
conducive to the extension of musical time through repetition, which in turn leads to a different concept of larger form when compared to the goals of the written tradition. Consequently, the seeming unimportance of formal complexity in African-based music is balanced with an emphasis on musical momentum as demonstrated by the responsiveness of the audience rather than by the music alone. Spontaneity also brings with it a level of unpredictability foreign to the written tradition, where the composer’s score is a fixed document not to be ventured away from.

It was in America where the clash between European and African musical ideals took place with greatest impact. For fear that the playing of African music would spark an uprising among the slaves, white slave masters prohibited slaves from playing this music. However, the slave masters were not entirely successful in their preventative efforts, as the slaves eagerly adapted whatever music they knew to the European and American instruments now at their disposal. As time went on, black people in America who were fortunate enough to obtain some level of formal musical training yet sought to remain close to deeply internalized African styles found themselves faced with the challenge of capturing elements of African style - tonality, rhythm, spontaneity - in written form. The musical genres and pieces resulting from the African American experience bear out the scope of that experience, ranging from the often non-notated work songs and early blues of the nineteenth century to the partially-notated jazz and popular songs of this century to entirely-notated ragtime tunes and concert music, each genre reflecting the degree to which African American musicians were assimilated into mainstream American culture. The challenge and promise innate in fusing elements of both the African American and European traditions has been taken on by numerous scholars, including Alain Locke (1886-1954), who spoke of African American composers “acquiring the outer mastery of
form and technique” and also “achieving an inner mastery of mood and spirit.” The former has been taken to refer to command of European elements (form, counterpoint, orchestration, etc.) while the latter addresses elements of the African American tradition (“blue” tonality, rhythmic devices, improvisatory components).

The tradition of African American composers working within the concert hall tradition, in roughly the century between the end of the Civil War and the appearance of Olly Wilson's first works, is a curious one and is complicated by the more dominant existence of concurrent African American folk and vernacular traditions which owe far less to European concert-hall influence. To be certain, even since colonial times, a handful of free and enslaved black musicians were afforded the privilege of taking part in the concert hall experience, principally as performers and far more rarely as composers; some had even been sent to study music in European conservatories. However, given the exceptional status of such musicians in America's racially divided culture, most African Americans identified more thoroughly with their own African-derived folk idioms.

From the end of the Civil War to the last years of the nineteenth century, a small number of African American composers gained a small but nonetheless visible foothold on the concert-hall world with highly original works within new and nontraditional genres. In contrast to large orchestral forces commanded by the likes of Wagner, Brahms, Mahler and other European contemporaries, the more modest nature of works by African American composers such as Justin Holland (1819-1886), James Bland (1854-1911), Harry T. Burleigh (1866-1949), speaks to the more limited means at their disposal. The little-remembered Holland is noted for his numerous works for solo guitar, an instrument to which many slaves had easy access, while Bland and Burleigh were known primarily for

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vocal music. Bland achieved great fame as a composer and performer of minstrel songs such as “Carry Me Back To Ole Virginny” and “Oh Dem Golden Slippers” while Burleigh is remembered for his composition and arrangement of spirituals and other songs as well as a number of choral works. Burleigh was himself a well-known and highly-talented baritone and was a crucial influence on Dvorak during that composer’s stay in America and, later, on French composer Darius Milhaud (1892-1974).

During this period and well into this century, the flourishing of the African American choral tradition led to the formation of choral groups at predominantly black colleges. With groups such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers so active and popular, the demand for choral literature increased greatly, prompting African American composers to contribute work in this idiom. Among them were Clarence Cameron White (1880-1960), Robert Nathaniel Dett (1882-1943), John W. Work III (1901-1967), and Margaret Bonds (1913-1972). It must also be noted that in addition to being known for their excellence as composers, each of these composers was revered as a performer in his or her own right: White as a violinist, Dett and Bonds as pianists, and Work as a vocalist. Moreover, the creative forces which informed their choral pieces carried over into their instrumental works, including compositions in solo, chamber, and orchestral genres.

Beginning near the turn of the century, Americans embraced ragtime, a popular genre of piano-based music which merged the syncopated rhythm and bluesy tonality of African and African American styles with the noticeable influence of European march and dance forms. While ragtime was primarily viewed as dancing music, its strict notation and large-scale forms also betrayed the composers’ exposure to European concert music. It comes as little surprise then, that ragtime was largely based in New Orleans, where a large population of mixed African, European, and Native American descent - the Creoles - were able to draw upon the region’s rich musical resources. Perhaps the best-known ragtime icon is St. Louis native Scott Joplin (1868-1917), whose oeuvre includes not only
piano pieces such as *Maple Leaf Rag* and *The Entertainer*, but also the opera *Treemonisha*, an ambitious work completed in 1911, but not premiered until 1972. Ragtime also exerted considerable influence on the many black brass and marching bands of the day and, in turn, was crucial to the development of early jazz.

America's entrance into World War I in 1917 marked the beginning of a turning point for African Americans. A number of black military units were sent to Europe, making the war the first time in American history a significant number of African Americans had traveled overseas. They found that many Europeans, particularly the French, were very receptive to African Americans and their culture, causing many black soldiers to openly question their mission of, in President Woodrow Wilson's words, "making the world safe for democracy" for almost every ethnic group except their own. When the war ended the following year, African American soldiers returned home filled with pride and ambition, determined to more forcefully assert themselves in every sphere of involvement, including the arts. This post-war movement later took on a name: the Harlem Renaissance.

The name was a reflection of the aspirations many African Americans felt could only be achieved in urban settings, mainly in the northern United States. Also implicit in this new mentality was recognition of the importance of a well-rounded education, as exemplified by one of most important composers in America at the time, William Grant Still (1895-1978). Although Still was born and raised in Mississippi and Arkansas, the move his family made to Los Angeles during the first decade of the century was indeed symbolic of African American migration trends of the time. Like many other African American composers who came before him, Still attended a predominantly black university (Wilberforce University in Xenia, Ohio), but he also studied at Oberlin College and was later a student of French pioneer Edgar Varese (1883-1965). However, he was also steeped in the blues and stage musical traditions, working as an oboist and arranger for many Harlem shows, including Eubie Blake's *Shuffle Along*. In spite of whatever fame and
fortune may have resulted from such professional associations, Still’s main interest was to compose music which integrated his African American vernacular music roots with his formal, European-oriented training. After purging much of Varese’s modernist influence from his music, he set out to write his Afro-American Symphony, a work infused with folk elements in a manner not unlike Dvorak’s American compositions or the nationalistic works such as Ma Vlast by Czech composer Bedrich Smetana (1824-1884). The symphony, which premiered in 1931, used European models of form and development in the realization of its folk themes garnered from the blues, the spiritual, and stage music. This type of synthesis became a hallmark for much of Still’s music, which included numerous piano works (Three Visions, Seven Traceries), chamber and orchestral works, choral works, ballets (Lennox Avenue, Miss Sally’s Party), and other stage works (the opera Troubled Island). Still’s work as a composer earned him numerous awards and honors, including Guggenheim and Rosenwald Fellowships, and earned him the label, “Dean of Negro Composers.” Not surprisingly, his example served as an inspiration to many other African American composers of his generation, including William Dawson (1899-1990) and Undine Smith Moore (1904-1989), both of whom wrote works which simultaneously projected their ethnic heritage and conservatory-trained sensibilities.

The ascendancy of Still also coincided with an American and European infatuation with popular African American genres in the 1920s, as reflected in the music of Igor Stravinsky (Rag-time for 11 Instruments, Ebony Concerto), Darius Milhaud (La Creation Du Monde), and George Gershwin (Rhapsody in Blue, Porgy and Bess). During this period, it was not unusual for white composers to be found in Harlem nightclubs in search of new and fresh ideas, perhaps as an alternative to the twelve-tone technique of the second Viennese school (Arnold Schoenberg [1874-1951], Anton Webern [1885-1935], and Alban Berg [1883-1945]) and the neoclassicism of Paul Hindemith. Most composers in the European concert music tradition had abandoned African American genres by the end of
the decade, but the growing popularity of jazz - big bands in particular - through the 1930s kept the artistry of black performers and composers in the public eye. Composer and bandleader Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington (1899-1974) is a seminal figure of this era not only for his immense popularity during this time, but also due to his scope and innovation as a composer. While it would be impossible to distill the full impact of Ellington’s music in as brief a space as allotted here, it is characterized by a level of sophistication previously thought unattainable by mere vernacular music. For nearly 80 years, it has attracted the serious attention of music scholars, who have carefully researched his work, and the depth and breadth of Ellington’s influence across the musical continuum cannot be understated.

African American composers whose works began to surface following World War II (1939-1945) and especially in the 1950s came of age during an especially significant time - not only for African Americans, but for artists the world over. Even more than was the case after World War I, America’s victory inspired African Americans to pursue a national agenda based on equality and desegregation. Within a decade of the war’s end, steps toward desegregation had been taken, first for the military and then for public schools. Although even more significant developments would take place in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the gradual move toward social integration translated into even greater access to traditionally white institutions for young African American composers, consequently resulting in more exposure to non-black composers and their works. As for the trends in concert music following the war, composers’ exploration of serialist, electronic, and aleatoric composition did not always endear them to the listening public, but helped give rise to the university as a primary venue for new music. Such a movement was very much at odds with folk music in general and African American vernacular music in particular, and unlike the previous generation of African American composers - who viewed the inclusion of folk elements as key to the goals of the Harlem Renaissance - the
younger composers of the 1950s produced music more rooted in the current European-oriented aesthetic. The new generation included the composers Ulysses Simpson Kay (b. 1917), George Walker (b. 1922), and Hale Smith (b. 1925), all products of the American conservatory establishment of the middle twentieth century. While all three were influenced by African American genres to a certain extent (the second movement of Walker’s 1975 Piano Concerto was inspired by and dedicated to the memory of Duke Ellington; Smith was active as a writer and arranger for numerous jazz artists), this influence was filtered through the compositional practices and new aesthetic in concert music and re-realized in such a way as to appear unclear to many listeners. As much as it would appear to be the case, these composers never sought to disavow their African American heritage, but were very successful in expanding the range of expression once thought to constitute the creative capacity of African American composers, a feat not lost on future composers of African American origin, including the three subjects of this paper.

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Considering the number of African American composers who are currently active, it bears to mention that the selection of Olly Wilson, Anthony Davis, and George Lewis for this paper is not an arbitrary one for at least three reasons. First, one goal was choose composers whose works span a wide range of time and of style and remain active to this day. The oldest of the three, Wilson, began his career during the middle 1960s and has produced a body of work which includes numerous chamber, orchestral, vocal, and electronic compositions and which reflects a repertoire that on the surface at least seems to represent an extension of the European-based concert music tradition. Anthony Davis began his career mainly characterized (to his dismay) as a jazz pianist and composer before making inroads to the world of contemporary concert music mainly as a result of his several operas. Lewis’s career encompasses a colorful cornucopia of stylistic
idioms and associations (including his work influenced by the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians and his experiments in interactive music) which are thoroughly modern in that they have become established only within the past three decades.

A second criterion was to select composers whose creative innovations are notable for their extensions of what was once thought (and in some sectors, is still thought) to be boundaries of the African American musical tradition. As we have seen earlier, those boundaries imposed upon that tradition throughout history - especially when coupled with European-based notions of “high art” and “low art” - have conspired to distort ideas surrounding African American-based art and too frequently place it in an unflattering light when compared to that of the European tradition. The work of these composers to expose new possibilities recalls that of their predecessors and renders Wilson, Davis, and Lewis fit to be remembered as the creative progeny of composers from previous generations such as William Grant Still and Duke Ellington.

The third reason behind the selection of these composers deals with their collective sense of identity as contemporary African American artists. All three freely recognize the debts they owe to the African American tradition and the presence of that tradition in their work, however uniquely expressed. Moreover, all three have articulated their pride in that tradition in interviews and research as well as in their music and have demonstrated an ongoing commitment to this issue which will presumably be carried into the future.

The next three chapters of this paper will examine each composer individually, covering their development as musicians, selected works, and their research into areas of intrinsic interest to African and African American musical study. The final chapter will survey their collective experiences as composers and scholars and suggest what these experiences say about various issues faced by African and African American composers today.
CHAPTER 2

OLLY WILSON

Oliver Woodrow Wilson was born on September 7, 1937 in St. Louis. While no one in his immediate family were musicians of professional status, all were active in the church choir and Wilson vividly recalls taking part in group singing at home as well. Given this background, it comes as little surprise that Wilson’s early interest in music was encouraged by his parents and he soon took up piano, which eventually led to a job performing at church on a regular basis. In middle school, Wilson enrolled in the school band as a clarinetist, impressing his conductors with his advanced musical sensibilities and his skills as a fast learner.

Although somewhat oblivious to the fact during his formative years, Wilson would later come to recognize the rich African American musical heritage of his hometown. In the early part of the century, Scott Joplin was active in St. Louis. Numerous jazz musicians such as Clark Terry (b. 1920) and Miles Davis (1926-1991) also hailed from the St. Louis area. Apart from the many world-renowned musicians it nurtured, the city also boasted an active population of amateur musicians, mainly in jazz and blues styles, but also involved in African American art song and choral traditions. Wilson’s father belonged to the Harry T. Burleigh Choral Society, a group named in honor of the late nineteenth-century pioneer in African American vocal music and dedicated to preserving the once-thriving tradition of African American choral singing exemplified by groups such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers.

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While at Sumner High School, one of St. Louis's two predominantly African American schools, Wilson continued to be a beneficiary of the city's deep musical legacy. Among those who had attended Sumner were opera vocalist Robert McFerrin, Sr. (b. 1921), three members of the popular group the Fifth Dimension, and saxophonist and composer Oliver Nelson (1932-1975), with whom Wilson would later share a close musical and personal relationship. Perhaps the most influential figure on Wilson during this time was his band director Clarence Hayden Wilson (no relation), longtime president of the National Association of Negro Musicians and an invaluable musical resource for the young Wilson. Aside from training Olly on the finer points of musicianship as it related to standard band and orchestral repertoire, the elder Wilson also encouraged Olly's growing interest in jazz and reinforced the importance of possessing good aural skills. By this time, Olly had supplemented his duties as church pianist with his responsibilities as the leader of a small jazz band made up of himself and his classmates. It was with this ensemble that Wilson made his first attempts at composing and arranging, leading to a role as musical director for Sumner's production of *Annie, Get Your Gun*. In seizing opportunities such as this, Wilson was quickly gaining the well-rounded experience which made him an attractive prospect as a music student at the college level.

Upon graduating from Sumner in 1955, Wilson enrolled in St. Louis's Washington University on a clarinet scholarship. However, within a year, Wilson had lost interest in the instrument, citing the bad technical habits he had developed while at Sumner and the lack of attention from his private clarinet instructor at Washington. Meanwhile, Wilson began to concentrate more on the double bass, another instrument to which he had been briefly introduced while still in high school, as well as continuing to maintain an active schedule as a jazz pianist. Wilson's involvement with Washington University's jazz ensemble brought him into contact with Oliver Nelson, who was a few years older than Wilson, but had returned to Washington after spending time on the road with various jazz
groups. The two Olivers struck up a friendship and also performed together on numerous occasions. One interest they both shared was composition, and while at Washington, Wilson found a sympathetic instructor in Robert Wykes, who introduced Wilson to twelve-tone technique and quickly realized the creative potential of his new student.

Wilson’s experience at Washington University marked the first time in his life he was immersed in a predominantly white environment and like many African American composers of his and the previous generation, his response was one of semi-assimilation, remaining faithful the African American idioms of his youth and early adulthood while vigorously exploring the music of the European concert tradition in a manner not unlike his white contemporaries. Later in his undergraduate career, Wilson would claim the influences of Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) and Edgar Varese alongside those of Charlie Parker (1920-1955) and Miles Davis and embrace an almost Brahmsian notion of “absolute music” as opposed to the Romantic tendencies of programmatic music and the functionality of African American genres. This mindset was reflected in early student works such as Prelude and Line Study and Trio for Flute, Cello, and Piano, works in which elements of Wilson’s personal style come through nevertheless, but which were first and foremost dedicated to showcasing creative prowess in terms of compositional technique.

Wilson’s talent as a composer led to his acceptance into the master’s program at the University of Illinois in 1959. After receiving his degree the following year, he took a position in the music department at Florida A. & M. College and eventually enrolled in the doctoral program at the University of Iowa, where he studied with Robert Kelley and Phillip Bezanson. His compositional output during his years as a graduate student continued to reflect his interest in twelve-tone composition and other modern techniques and his acculturation to the more eclectic aesthetic which had come to characterize American composition since the 1950s, but by the mid-1960s, Wilson was actively
establishing relationships with other African American composers. One crucial contact was Wendell Logan (b. 1940), who Wilson met at the 1964 Composers’ Symposium in Dallas. Both composers sought a forum through which African American composers and their works could become better known. Given the momentum that the civil rights movement had taken on by this time, African American composers and other artists yearned for the visibility they were often denied by the more established white institutions. In 1967, Wilson participated in the Black Composers’ Concert in Atlanta hosted by Wendell Whalum of Morehouse College and composer and conductor Robert Shaw. This also proved to be a milestone for Wilson, for it was here that he met other African American composers such as George Walker and Thomas Jefferson Anderson (b. 1928).

Wilson earned his doctorate from the University of Iowa in 1964, whereupon he held faculty positions at West Virginia University, Indiana University, and Oberlin College through the end of the decade. In 1967, he returned to the University of Illinois to study electronic composition, resulting in the completion of his first major electronic work, Cetus in 1968. Wilson submitted Cetus for the Dartmouth Arts Council electronic composition competition, whose panel included composer Milton Babbitt (b. 1916). After all works were judged anonymously, Cetus was declared the top winner. This marked a major event not only for Wilson, but for all African American composers in general in proving the viability of works by African American composers to stand alone and be judged strictly on musical merit without race being a factor.

In 1970, Wilson accepted a position as professor of music at the University of California at Berkeley, where he has remained to this day. Since then, he has divided his time between composing and exploring the issues surrounding African American musical forms and genres and the unique aspects of the African American creative process. In doing so, Wilson has proved himself to be a capable and articulate scholar in this area and, along with Samuel Floyd and Eileen Southern, has done much to elevate the level of
debate regarding the music of African Americans. Given the importance of his research, it behooves us to examine it closely.

Throughout Wilson's numerous writings on African American music and musicians, several recurrent themes are touched upon. Among those themes are the compositional techniques and devices of African American composers; the content, structure, and sources of African and African American music; and the aesthetic issues which must be considered when interpreting and evaluating African and African American music. The first theme, as exemplified in the articles "The Black-American Composer," and "Composition from the Perspective of the African-American Tradition," utilizes a DuBois-derived notion of double consciousness to address the two-tiered mastery of which Locke wrote. What Locke defined as the "mastery of mood and spirit," or an inherent understanding African and African American genres and styles, Wilson calls composition from "within the veil." In addition to the many indigenous forms of earlier eras, this component "...encompasses the wordless moans of a mid-week poorly attended prayer meeting, the Saturday-night ecstatic shrieks of a James Brown, the relentless intensity of the modal excursions of a John Coltrane, and the tonal word-songs of teenage brothers 'rapping' on the corner..."\(^1\) Conversely, there is also Locke's "mastery of form," or "composition outside the veil," as defined by Wilson. This comes from intensive exposure to and study of concert music in the European tradition. In an African American composer, both traditions are internalized, albeit in not necessarily equal fashion. The resultant music, Wilson contends, does not fall squarely into one tradition or the other, but rather at any given point along the continuum which spans both of them. Therefore, using Burleigh's popular solo arrangement of "Deep River" as an example in the later article, Wilson accounts for the composer's familiarity with what is an essentially ethnic genre, the

spiritual, with its various idiomatic musical and performance elements, as well as an awareness of form, thematic development, and sonority garnered from years of study in the European concert music tradition.²

The principles underlying Wilson’s writings on the content, structure, and sources of African and African American music have evolved into what he terms “the heterogeneous sound ideal,” and while Wilson contends that this label does not purport to be comprehensive in scope, his research has made a strong case for it being a prevailing standard by which to approach music by African and African American composers. The quest for such a concept is motivated by the question, “What is black music?”, the answer to which may at first resemble a list of qualifying factors to be satisfied by the music under consideration. Prior to Wilson, many scholars investigated “blue” tonality, African-derived rhythmic practices, improvisatory elements, call-and-response devices, and other areas commonly associated with the music of Africa and the Diaspora, concluding to varying degrees that the inclusion of these elements in a piece of music was contingent upon it being “black music.” Wilson’s approach is indeed similar in that it enumerates specific criteria to be fulfilled, but rather than treating those criteria as a mere recipe, Wilson maintains that the real issue is one of mindset:

“The substance to that approach [to the creation of black music] is that the essence of the black music tradition consists of the common sharing of a core of conceptual approaches to the process of music making and, hence, is not quantitative but qualitative. The particular forms of black music which evolved in America are specific realizations of this shared conceptual framework which reflects the peculiarities of the American black experience. As such, the essence of their Africaness is not a static body of something which can be depleted, but rather a conceptual approach, the manifestations of which are infinite. The common core of this Africaness consists of the way of doing something, not simply something that is done.”³


This “way of doing something” includes Wilson’s heterogeneous sound ideal, which he defines as “a common approach to music making in which a kaleidoscopic range of dramatically contrasting qualities of sound (timbre) is sought after in both vocal and instrumental music.” This ideal is exemplified in the instrumentation of musical ensembles as well as in solo passages. For instance, an African ensemble consisting of such timbrally dissimilar instruments as a drum, a bell, and a flute contrasts with the more uniform texture of a string quartet, which is based in the European tradition. Likewise, one is more likely to encounter drastic timbral shifts within a single line in African-based vernacular music - as in a solo performance by a gospel vocalist or in a solo passage of a jazz piece - than in the canon of European concert music, at least prior to the advent of extended instrumental and vocal techniques in the literature of this century.

Elsewhere in the article, Wilson also lists other prevalent tendencies in African and African American music making which distinguish it from the music of other cultures:

1. The tendency to approach the organization of rhythm based on the principle of rhythmic and implied metrical contrast - a tendency to create musical events in which rhythmic clash and disagreement of accents is the ideal, and cross-rhythm and metrical ambiguity are the accepted, expected norm.

2. The tendency to approach singing or the playing of any instrument in a percussive manner - a manner in which qualitative stress accents are frequently used.

3. The tendency to create musical forms in which antiphonal, responsorial, or call-and-response musical structures abound. These responsorial structures frequently exist simultaneously on a number of different architectonic levels.

4. The tendency to create a high density of musical events within a relatively short musical time frame - a tendency to fill up all the musical space.

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5. The tendency to incorporate physical body motion as an integral part of the music making process.⁵

One need not look very deeply into African and African American idioms to find examples of these tendencies. Cross rhythms dominate African drumming; the percussive approach to piano performance is defined by African composer and music scholar Akin Euba as “African pianism”⁶ and is also common in the playing of numerous jazz pianists, including Ellington and Thelonious Monk (1917-1982); call-and-response devices are crucial to much African American gospel music; a great deal of African- and African American-based music - ranging from African drum music to jazz to rhythm and blues (R&B) and funk - consists of several layers of activity, which when combined create a dense tapestry of sound; and the use of dance with music is rooted in African customs in which diverse art forms - music, dance, poetry, visual art - are combined and taken in together. As we shall see later, these tendencies also figure in Wilson’s own music, even works which may at first seem more European-based than derived from African and African American ideals.

The third major theme encountered in Wilson’s writings on African and African American musical styles and genres, namely the aesthetic considerations surrounding any serious discussion of the music, is well documented in any of the aforementioned articles, but constitutes the main focus of his essay, “Black Music as an Art Form,” which appeared in the Black Music Research Journal in 1983. In addition to revisiting issues springing from his “heterogeneous sound ideal” concept, Wilson explores the dissimilar

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philosophies which guide discussions and analysis of African- and European-based music. He concludes that African-derived art is essentially utilitarian in function whereas the notion of creating art for the sole purpose of being appreciated as such (art for art’s sake) is essentially a European one. African tribal chants, plantation work songs, worship music: all serve non-musical purposes yet when the music alone is extracted, its aesthetic import cannot be denied. However, because these genres do not readily conform to the same creative disposition which governs the conception of European-based concert music, they are too often not allowed to exist on as exalted a level as European genres such as the symphony, the opera, and the concerto. This is so, Wilson contends, because the European aesthetic seeks to distinguish entertainment (low art) from works of supposedly profound intellectually and/or emotional endeavor (high art). This contrasts with the underlying goal of much African- and African American-derived music, which Wilson labels as achieving “functional efficacy”; that is, successfully facilitating the task at hand, be it dancing; the strenuous, repetitive labors of slave work; or inducing a more elevated spiritual state. While such functionality is certainly not foreign to European-based music, a work whose existence derives exclusively from a non-musical source is sometimes thought less consequential than one in which the music is its own raison de être. Functionality in the European aesthetic has often been interpreted as a hallmark of lower art forms and as a result, music based on functionality falls short of the perceived legitimacy of high art. In his writings, Wilson advocates a more pluralistic approach to music analysis and criticism, one that takes into account a work’s placement not only within one aesthetic tradition, but across many and one in which the “double veiled” creativity which drives work such as that by African American composers is valued as an enriching factor rather than condemned as one of dilution or artistic compromise.

In the continuum which spans both African and European musical traditions, Wilson’s own work falls on several places of the spectrum, ranging from pieces in which his
“heterogeneous sound ideal” and other tendencies evident in African- and African American-based music dominate the forefront to pieces in which the influence of his European-based conservatory training and familiarity with contemporary compositional language comes through in such a way as to render his work not unlike that of his Caucasian counterparts. While in-depth analyses of any compositions within Wilson’s vast body of work would be well-served by a separate paper, we will briefly consider a few selected works taken from different stages of Wilson’s career.

*Piece for Four* was composed in 1966 and premiered the following year at a festival at Oberlin by an ensemble featuring the composer on double bass. The three other instruments used in the piece are piano, flute, and trumpet, the latter using a Harmon mute throughout the piece’s three movements. Musically, the general pitch language of the piece is atonal, and at times, Wilson dabbles in serialism. This reflects to a large degree the composer’s European-based influences, but African American influence - particularly that of jazz - is not entirely absent from the piece, as Wilson and other scholars have pointed out. It is mostly represented by the instrumentation, especially the double bass and trumpet. The second movement focuses largely on solo double bass material, much of it utilizing jazz techniques such as pizzicato and portamento and the use of the Harmon mute on the trumpet strongly recalls Miles Davis, whom the composer considered an inspiration for the piece. It should also be noted that the piece has an overall improvisatory character, although strict notation is used throughout.

African and African American influences figure even more prominently in Wilson’s *Akwan*, composed in 1972. Once again, they are greatly manifested in the work’s timbre and instrumentation, which includes muted brass recalling jazz; a large number of percussion instruments, betraying the influence of West African drum music; and the use of the Fender Rhodes electric piano, an instrument which dominated much of the decade’s jazz and R&B music. Much of *Akwan* is highly polyrhythmic and at times, performers are
called upon to "swing" their passages, once again alluding to the West African and jazz traditions.

In studying the piece Sometimes, composed for voice and tape, we find a curious balance between an African American folk genre and concerns with large-scale development not unlike those in a work in the European tradition. Wilson began work on Sometimes - a project largely funded by a grant from the National Academy of Arts and Letters - in 1975 with tenor William Brown and it was premiered in 1976. In the piece, which is based on the spiritual "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child," the tape consists of an array of synthetic textures interwoven with fragments of the spiritual, which is itself often modified electronically. The purpose of the vocal part is not so much to present a straightforward statement of the melody against the electronic backdrop, but to interact with tape, sometimes to the point of becoming indistinguishable from it. In keeping with African American vocal tradition and the heterogeneous sound ideal, the tenor part employs a number of coloristic nuances, melismas, and other means of melodic deviation which mirror the elasticity and wide timbral range of the tape part. The work takes on what may very well be viewed as a sonata form, beginning with a series of motives based on the original melody, leading a development which explores those motives in microscopic detail, and ends by revisiting the first material. In summary, while much of the piece is informed by African American musical tradition, Wilson’s treatment of form derives from European tradition, once again recalling the “double-veiled” mentality spoken of by DuBois.

One other work of interest is Sinfonia, which Wilson composed in 1983 and 1984 on a commission from the Boston Symphony Orchestra in celebration of its centennial season. Wilson refers to this work in the 1996 Black Music Research Journal article and the description of the third movement’s African American elements is best summarized in the composer’s own words that follow:
"This movement is a stylized dance and consists of two distinct ideas: one, an angular melody stated in the high strings; and the second, a propulsive rhythmic idea based on an insistent syncopated rhythmic pattern:

\[ \text{\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{pattern.png}} \]

The texture of the orchestral statement of this idea is clearly influenced by concepts characteristic of African-American tradition. The low strings and horn state the persistent but constantly shifting rhythmic pattern, while the percussion, trombones, and high trumpets carry on an antiphonal dialogue with the principle line as well as with each other. Timbrally, each is distinctly delineated, and the resultant composite texture is one in which the accents are extremely irregular, percussive, and timbrally kaleidoscopic - a textual ideal evident in many genres of African and African-American music. At the end of the movement the characteristic propulsive rhythm returns but in a configuration that is more characteristic of a jazz or blues riff. In a broad sense in this work I am using the technique of troping or signifying on previously existing rhythmic concepts."\(^7\)

While the four works described above are among Wilson's best-known works, a number of others are also worthy of mention. Other notable compositions include 1970's *Voices*, another orchestral work commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra along with the Fromm Foundation; 1973's *Spirit-Song* for soprano soloist, double chorus, and orchestra, which presents a miniature history of the spiritual and its evolution; *Expansions I and II*, the first installment completed in 1979 for organ and the second completed in 1988 for orchestra; and number of works utilizing electronic media, including "Piano Piece" (1969), *In Memoriam, Martin Luther King, Jr.* (1969), for chorus and electronic sound, *Black Martyrs* (1972), and *Echoes* (1975) for clarinet and tape. Wilson's use of electronics has often been called into question in relation its place within the African American tradition, especially in light of the fact that electronic composition has historically been associated with white composers and in the early stages of the electronic composition movement, a great number of black students had little or no access to adequate facilities, especially at historically black colleges and universities. "My response, in some despair, was to point out to my brothers that for several hundred years now since

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our forefathers' involuntary departure from the homeland, black people have been adapting machines in the American environment to suit their purposes. . . No where has this adaptation been truer than in music. After all the Belgian Adolph Sax invented the saxophone and Jimmie [sic] Smith's last name was not Hammond.\textsuperscript{8}

Wilson remains active as a composer and scholar up through the present, his recent works including the chamber work \textit{A City Called Heaven} (1989), based on the spiritual of the same name; the orchestral works \textit{Of Visions and Truth} (1991), \textit{Expansions III} (1993), and \textit{Shango Memory} (1996); and his third symphony (1999), subtitled \textit{Hold On} (also the name of a spiritual) and recently commissioned and premiered by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Wilson's fame and stature as a composer extends well beyond the United States to several other continents and numerous trips to Africa and South American have resulted in the expansion of his body of research. Without a doubt, as the century closes, Wilson's work over the past three decades - with the promise of more to come in the future - should earn him the distinguished place in history he so richly deserves.

\textsuperscript{8} Olly Wilson, "The Black-American Composer," \textit{The Black Perspective in Music} 1 (spring 1973): 36.
CHAPTER 3

ANTHONY DAVIS

The son of Charles Davis, an American literature professor and also a founding father of modern African American studies, Anthony Davis, born on February 20, 1951 in Paterson, New Jersey, spent the better part of his childhood immersed in academic culture. Besides the academic standing of his father, his ancestors were crucial to the founding of the Hampton Institute, a historically black college founded in 1868 in Virginia, and his family's tradition of excellence was not lost on young Anthony. While growing up in various college towns, including State College, Pennsylvania and Princeton, New Jersey (where his father was the university's first black professor), Davis began studying piano at an early age, often with classically-trained professors at the universities where his father taught. He later developed an interest in jazz, as evidenced by his growing record collection and experimentation with improvisation in his middle adolescent years. However, Davis was not eager to leave behind one tradition in favor of the other, a source of conflict and strength in years to come.

As an undergraduate at Yale, Davis majored in English and philosophy before later settling on music. By this time, the pendulum of his musical interests had swung mainly to jazz, an area very much at odds with Yale's more European-oriented music faculty. After a few years at Yale, Davis left for a short while, during which time he co-founded Advent, a group immersed in contemporary jazz styles. He later returned to Yale and studied composition with Jacob Druckman and found it to be an area of particular satisfaction. By
this time, Davis sought to incorporate the structural exactness of composition with the improvisatory freedom of jazz, blurring lines between the two in the tradition of Duke Ellington, Thelonious Monk (1917-1982), and Cecil Taylor (b. 1929). In doing so, Davis found himself in a position where he was called upon to define the exact nature of his music, a process which would eventually lead Davis to discard the label “jazz” entirely. As Davis later told one writer:

“I’ve never related my conception of music - or Cecil Taylor’s music, either, for that matter - to the term jazz... [Jazz audiences] still come expecting to hear solos on ‘I Got Rhythm’ changes, and I’m not interested in that. All the labels they put on music are stupid, but so long as there are labels, if I could be associated with new music instead of jazz, it would give me more freedom to create, and I wouldn’t be tied down to pre-existing forms, the way I am with jazz.” [original emphasis]

Upon graduating with his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1975, Davis remained in Connecticut for two more years, studying at nearby Wesleyan University with Indian drummer Amruth Raghaven, and Davis quickly learned the finer points of Indian music, which had fascinated him since his days at Yale. He also delved deeply into Indonesian gamelan music, a highly polyrhythmic style which would heavily influence Davis’s own works. While in New Haven, Davis also met several like-minded musicians who shared his philosophies regarding the limitations of labels, specifically the term “jazz”. Among these influences were two key Chicago natives: Leo Smith, a trumpeter, composer, and theorist seeking to codify an argument in favor of composition’s importance to jazz and leader of the group New Delta Akiri, with whom Davis performed from 1974 to 1977; and fellow Yale student George Lewis, a young trombonist with whom Davis would frequently collaborate.

In search of more opportunities for creativity and exposure, Davis moved to New York City in 1977, only to encounter a scene often not as receptive to his ideas about music as

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he had hoped. Much of this can be attributed to the climate surrounding jazz and new music in New York and across the country during the 1970s. Since the late 1960s, with the death of saxophonist John Coltrane in 1967 and Miles Davis’s abandonment of more traditional jazz forms in favor of music more influenced by rock and funk, jazz - at least from the standpoint of record companies, critics and its audience, if not the performers themselves - had splintered into several sub-genres, without a central figure to define its mission and future. Devotees of Coltrane (1926-1967) tried earnestly to extend his legacy; Miles Davis and his many followers reaped the adulation and financial rewards of catering to a young audience weaned on contemporary popular styles; and there was also the continuation of the “free jazz” movement largely associated with saxophonist Ornette Coleman (b. 1930) since the late 1950s. While none of these trends were mutually exclusive, record companies, club owners and anyone else connected with the promotion and distribution of jazz in the 1970s faced the challenge of determining which artists and styles would appeal to an increasingly divided and dwindling audience. All of this contributed to a competitive and market-centered environment for jazz performers in New York during this time, one toward which Davis would later express frustration and disdain. At the same time, Davis chose not to align himself too closely with what he called “new music,” too often a euphemism for minimalism and other trappings of the avant garde at that time. Echoing his sentiments on the label “jazz,” Davis says, “I knew I could not be accepted as a straight-ahead jazz musician, nor would I accept myself as that. I would never be accepted as a minimalist. I wouldn’t be a downtown composer. Because I find all orthodoxies, all doctrines to be ultimately banal.”

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Davis's uncompromising stance and polemics did not endear him to New York's jazz hierarchy, but neither did critical indifference discourage Davis from continuing to develop as a composer. Davis's early albums - including Song for the Old World, Hidden Voices (both for the India Navigation label), and Of Blues and Dreams (Sackville) - introduced him as a pianist and composer whose ambition and imagination paralleled that of his idols: Ellington, Monk, Taylor, and also Andrew Hill (b. 1937). The albums also showcased Davis's affinity for compositional structure and instrumental combinations unusual to jazz; for instance, Hidden Voices features George Lewis on trombone and James Newton (another frequent collaborator) on flute and Of Blues and Dreams finds the composer interacting with Leroy Jenkins and Abdul Wadud on violin and cello, respectively. Davis also recorded albums solo piano music: Past Lives (Red Records) and Lady of the Mirrors (India Navigation). The former is notable for containing a suite of compositions by Monk while the latter introduced Davis's "Under the Double Moon," a Balinese-influenced piece which Davis would later record as a piano-vibraphone duet with Jay Hoggard and as a full-fledged opera. While many of Davis's early albums are no longer in print, they are now regarded as high points during a period of stagnation in jazz in the late 1970s. This point of view is adequately summarized by Gary Giddens's assessment of Lady of the Mirrors: "[The album] solidifies Davis's position in the vanguard of pianists who've embraced jazz in the past decade; its conscious meld of formal and improvised invention ought to serve as an antidote to the indulgent esoterica that has characterized so many piano recitals of the '70s."

In 1980, Davis assembled an octet consisting of himself, Lewis, Wadud, Hoggard, Dwight Andrews on various woodwinds, Shem Guibbory on violin, and Warren Smith and

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Pheeroan Aklaff on percussion. He named the group Episteme, a Greek term translating to "the knowledge of the underlying form of things," a term certainly consistent with Davis's compositional philosophy. The following year, the group released an album of the same name on Gramavision Records and it was hailed by many critics as a forward-thinking work of considerable scope. In it, Davis united diametrically opposed elements such as composition and improvisation, and gamelan-inspired cross-rhythms and neo-Impressionistic sonorities seamlessly and convincingly, leaving some listeners at a loss when it came to categorizing the exact style of the music. While the jazz influence was certainly evident, Davis took on an approach to structure and orchestration which drew comparisons to the chamber music of Maurice Ravel (1875-1937). Since Davis was still reluctantly labeled as a "jazz" composer and performer, he remained isolated from the jazz mainstream, which by the early 1980s counted among its ranks a number of younger neo-traditional performers - trumpeter Wynton Marsalis (b. 1961); his brother, saxophonist Branford Marsalis (b. 1960), and pianist Marcus Roberts (b. 1964) among them - who sought to restore 1950s hard bop and the 1960s post-bop of Miles Davis and John Coltrane as the creative point of departure for jazz in 1980s. While Anthony Davis no doubt respected the skill and artistry of the new "young lions" of jazz, he viewed the creative and commercial agenda which drove the movement with great skepticism, admonishing at one point, "If somebody uses tradition as a way of limiting your choices, in a way that's as racist as saying you have to sit in the back of the bus."^4

Davis's aspiration to move beyond the confines of jazz and new music as dictated by writers and musicians alike became more evident as the decade moved on. Davis's next project with Episteme was a collaboration with dancer/choreographer Molissa Fenley and

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the five-movement suite is captured on the recording *Hemispheres* (Gramavision). Shortly after the completion of *Hemispheres*, Davis took on perhaps his most challenging project up to that point, a work which originated with his brother Christopher and was based on the life of civil rights leader Malcolm X.

Anthony Davis conceived the subject of his brother's work as befitting of an opera, and their cousin, Thulani Davis, was called upon to write the libretto. Although the Davises could have easily based a work on Malcolm X’s landmark tome, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, they approached the work more as character study than as an account of the life of a contemporary personality. The work would emphasize Malcolm X as a man perpetually in transition, from his boyhood in Michigan to his early adulthood as a street-hustler in Boston, his conversion to the Muslim faith while in prison, his years under the tutelage of Elijah Mohammed, and his final years as a crusader for human rights after breaking with the Nation of Islam. In keeping with Malcolm X’s love and appreciation of music, Anthony incorporated elements of the different styles Malcolm encountered throughout his life, ranging from the big bands of his youth to Coltrane’s modal jazz of the 1960s and Muslim devotional music. Yet these styles were not represented directly, but filtered through Davis’s own unique musical language, as evidenced by the presence of Episteme within the pit orchestra. The group functioned as an improvisatory core in the context of the entire ensemble, Davis once again looking to strike a balance between structured and free components.

In June of 1984, the first act of *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X* was premiered by Philadelphia’s American Music Theater Festival. Davis’s connection with jazz led some writers to brand *X* as the heir apparent to Joplin’s *Treemonisha*, although the abbreviated production obscured the massive depth and breadth the work would later take on. The first full-length production of *X* took place in October of 1985, with television and movie actor Avery Brooks playing the part of Malcolm. In spite of the three Philadelphia
performances, the New York City Opera company, under the direction of Beverly Sills, would claim credit for mounting the grand premiere of X during the following year. In commercial and critical terms, Davis could claim X as a success; the performances played to sold-out audiences and inspired acclaim from writers such as Andrew Porter of The New Yorker. He wrote, “[X] has brought new life to America’s conservative operatic scene, being a work that is at once genuinely new, musically and theatrically effective, and concerned with matter that [is] still inflammatory.” However, despite accolades such as this, the production costs of X were astounding, no doubt due to the huge cast of 40 members and the 36-piece orchestra required. Some concerns surrounding the production of X were more racially-based: musical directors feared such a piece would alienate the mostly white opera-going audience and would do little to bring African Americans into the opera house on a regular basis. None of these possible difficulties caused Davis to abandon the work and he later adapted the work for orchestra with soloists and chorus (Xcerpts) and released the opera on the Gramavision record label in 1992, earning him a Grammy nomination for Best Contemporary Classical Composition.

X marked a turning point in Davis’s career as a composer, after which he began focusing his creative energies on works to be performed in the concert hall. In 1988, he completed Maps, a very percussion-oriented violin concerto, and another orchestra piece, Notes from the Underground. As in his earlier works, allusions were made to Ellington and gamelan music, but Davis’s protests about being recognized strictly as a jazz musician began to subside as writers started approaching his work with more open-mindedness. Maps later appeared on a Gramavision recording featuring Shem Guibbory with the Kansas City Orchestra under the direction of William McGlaughlin.

For Davis's next major project, he revisited an earlier work, *Under the Double Moon* and recast it a full-length opera with a libretto by his first wife, Deborah Atherton. Based on more of a science-fiction premise, the work was a stunning departure from the stark realism of *X*. It related the story of a human brother and his water-born twin sister finding themselves neither on land nor at sea, but in outer space. For the music, Davis drew upon his Balinese influences as fervently as ever, creating hypnotic, gently undulating textures of subtlety unmatched in much of Davis's earlier work. When the opera premiered in St. Louis in July, 1989, it elicited mixed responses from reviewers more accustomed to the more decisive propulsion of *X*. William Weaver of *Opera News* found the work lacking in direction and criticized what he interpreted as a nebulous and meandering score by Davis. In contrast, Lawrence J. Dennis of *Opera Canada*, also reporting on a St. Louis performance, cited only three unsuccessful moments during the opera, stating the overall, Davis's music “proved compelling and moved with exciting momentum.”

By the late 1980s, Davis had proved himself a composer of astonishing range and depth, a fact not to be overlooked by the academic world. He was appointed Senior Fellow for Cornell University's Society for the Humanities in 1987 and would later take on more permanent teaching positions, including one as Visiting Professor of Music at Yale in 1990 and another as Professor of Music and African-American Studies at Harvard University in 1992. During the early 1990s, Davis also accepted a number of commissions for new concert works, including a Brass Quintet commissioned Chamber Music America and premiered by the Saturday Brass Quintet in 1991; a Violin Sonata commissioned by Carnegie Hall and also first performed in 1991; and *Litany of Sins*, a chamber symphony commissioned by St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble of New York and premiered in 1992.

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During the amazingly prolific period, Davis also managed to craft another opera, staking out somewhat of a middleground between his first two. Like X, Tania was based on a real-life subject taken from recent memory, the kidnapping of Patty Hearst; like Under the Double Moon, Davis’s new opera revelved in surreal, sometimes dream-like imagery. Tania marked a departure from both works in that rather than aiming for musical continuity through the work, it was very much a “number opera” whose set pieces were more informed by American musical theater and popular music than standard operatic repertoire. For the premiere of Tania, Davis returned to Philadelphia’s American Musical Theater Festival in June, 1992. Unlike X, Tania demanded a considerably more compact cast and orchestra and the presence of television monitors within the decidedly plain stage set brought attention to the element of media frenzy surrounding the Hearst story in particular and sensational news in general. Davis’s score, which alluded to jazz, Motown, and funk, was considered by many critics to be his most accessible to that point. As Leighton Kerner of the Village Voice observed, “[Tania] sights a new marking in Davis’s development as a composer. X was fully occupied with putting precociously complex rhythmic schemes to intensely dramatic uses. Under the Double Moon conceived an idealized fantasy of mysticism and personal ethics in terms of lyrical vocal lines more sustained than X’s narrative agenda had room for. In Tania, vocal lyricism is still there but tightened into anger or mockery. And dancey [sic] rhythms once more dominate, but in a far looser way than in most of X. The melodic idiom stands with one foot in tonality and the other in atonality, but the stance is assured and convincing.” The composer also concedes the influence of musical theater, but quickly refrains from labeling Tania a product of that tradition. “I was entertaining the notion of writing a musical at one point,

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but I can’t deal with the forms,” Davis has said. “This is about as close as I’m going to get.”

In the next wave of his projects that took shape over the following five years, Davis would make his formal debut as a Broadway composer, scoring Tony Kushner’s acclaimed play *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* and its companion piece, *Perestroika* in 1993. Two years later, his orchestra piece *Esu Variations*, named for the African trickster god, was debuted by the Atlanta Symphony, which had commissioned the work for its 50th anniversary season. 1995 also witnessed the premiere of *Happy Valley Blues*, a piece for violin, guitar, piano, and double bass performed by Davis and the String Trio of New York; and *Dance*, a chamber orchestra piece later choreographed by Ralph Lemon and titled, “Pale Grass and Blue, and then Red.”

During the mid-1990s, Davis once again found himself heeding the call of the opera house. As with *Under the Double Moon*, Davis’s next opera found its musical and conceptual source in previous works: his choral piece *Voyage Through Death to Life Upon These Shores* and his piano piece *Middle Passage*, inspired by Robert Hayden’s poem of the same name. The opera, *Amistad*, was named after a ship upon which a slave rebellion took place while in route to America in 1839. Following the uprising, the ship lost its course and landed off the coast of Long Island and the recaptured Africans were immediately detained. After a prolonged legal battle over the Africans’ American status - slave or free - the case was finally taken up by the U.S. Supreme Court, where the Africans, represented by former President John Quincy Adams, won their freedom and were transported back to Africa.

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In terms of its production and creative framework, much of Amistad hearkened back to X. Once again, Thulani Davis served as librettist and everything from the large stage cast to the jazz-ensemble-within-the-pit-orchestra concept evidenced a work of ambitious scope. Another X connection was the participation of tenor Thomas Young, who played the part of Street in the earlier opera and took on the role of the Esu-inspired Trickster God in Amistad. Another feature of Amistad was an onstage African drumming ensemble which counterbalanced the almost naive simplicity of music performed by the white settlers, the latter consisting of, in the composer’s words, “a lot of simple triads.”

The debut of Amistad at Lyric Opera of Chicago in November of 1997 was accompanied by considerable fanfare and curiosity, although mainly derived from Steven Spielberg’s concurrent release of a motion picture of the same name and dealing with the same incident. (It should also be mentioned that Spike Lee’s motion picture based on the life of Malcolm X was released some seven years after the Philadelphia debut of Davis’s opera, though it was not based on the opera itself.) Under the direction of George C. Wolfe, with whom Davis worked in the Kushner productions, Amistad elicited a wide array of responses ranging from confused disappointment to unreserved praise. Jon Von Rhein of Opera News represented the first camp, writing, “Anthony Davis was best when he allowed himself to draw on his jazz roots. . . Davis’s[s] score resorted to a blandly eclectic grab bag of repeated rhythmic patterns, jumpy shifts of meter and an all-purpose parlando vocal style that made almost every character sound the same.” Conversely, Mark Stryker of the Detroit Free Press expressed acclaim for the work, stating, “Davis’s[s] music for Amistad offers challenges of its own to contemporary critics, especially stylistic

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purists or those who expect music by black composers to make explicit reference to blues or jazz. His music argues that African-American and European influences are hopelessly entangled in American culture, and that it's one's birthright as an American to call upon any voice at any time. . .”¹¹

Since the staging of *Amistad*, Davis continues to be immersed in a number of projects. He continues to be active as an educator and in early 1998, he accepted a full-time position professorship at the University of California at San Diego. (He has taught there intermittently since 1995.) Under commission from the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, he composed *Tales (Tails) of the Signifying Monkey*, which the group premiered in October, 1998. At present, he is overseeing the recording of his opera *Tania*, which will join X and a number of his other large works currently available to the public in recorded form. Having produced such a large oeuvre before reaching the age of 50, Davis's legacy as composer continues to unfold; as one observer summarizes, “From Episteme to the symphony orchestra, from jazz to opera, Davis’s journey has been one of unceasing growth. It has left American music all the richer. And it is far from over.”¹²

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CHAPTER 4

GEORGE LEWIS

Born in Chicago on July 14, 1952, George Lewis did not come from an especially musical family, but like Olly Wilson and Anthony Davis, he showed precocious musical talent early in life. At age nine, he began playing the trombone and was largely self-taught on the instrument. Lewis and classmate Ray Anderson (b. 1952), both students at Chicago’s Lab School on the south side of the city, would later become leading trombonists of their generation. Lewis’s principle instructor at the Lab School, Dean Hey, introduced Lewis to a wide range of band and orchestral literature and also stimulated the young trombonist’s interest in improvisation. Another important early influence on Lewis as a musician was saxophonist Lester Young and Lewis memorized and religiously practiced many of Young’s solos, emulating the saxophonist’s light, feathery tone.

In 1970, Lewis entered Yale University as a philosophy major, but his commitment to music was by no means dormant, as would prove to be the case during the following summer. One day, while back home in Chicago from Yale, Lewis found himself inadvertently intruding on a rehearsal led by pianist and composer Muhal Richard Abrams (b. 1930), a central figure in the city’s Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians. It was an especially profound experience for Lewis; shortly thereafter, he joined the AACM and began studying composition with Abrams at the AACM school in Chicago while still attending Yale. His membership with this organization would lead to
many future collaborations with other AACC artists such as Abrams, saxophonist Anthony Braxton, and multi-instrumentalist Douglas Ewart (b. 1946).

Given the importance of the AACC to Lewis’s musical development and career, some explanation of the group’s creation and mission is warranted. Founded in 1965, the AACC - along with St. Louis’s Black Artist Group and the Detroit Creative Musicians Association - was dedicated to promoting an expanded and seemingly all-inclusive concept of African American creativity. The group recognized the more dominant African American musical traditions - blues, jazz, R&B - as smaller components of a more panoramic tradition which drew from African and European ideals as well. As for the actual music produced by AACC artists, it is best summarized by the following passage from Mark Gridley’s book, Jazz Styles: History and Analysis:

“First, its rhythmic feeling lacks the flowing, easy character of conventional jazz and is more like the unpredictable nature of modern concert music. Second, solos are often freely improvised and inspired more by the mood of the piece than by standard bop patterns. Third, the music uses a larger assortment of accompaniment rhythms than was common to bop. And fourth, the proceedings display a rough quality consistent with the [Charles] Mingus concept that each performance is really a public workshop rather than a finished product.”

[original emphasis]

Abrams, Braxton, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, and other AACC artists - along with Sun Ra (1914-1993) and Charles Mingus (1922-1979) - stood in direct contrast to more mainstream performers such as Miles Davis and John Coltrane, whose ambitions mainly stemmed from expanding the bop tradition of the 1950s. Conversely, AACC’s self-consciously progressive agenda became aligned with jazz’s avant-garde movement, although many AACC members and scholars would argue the use of the term “jazz” in accurate accounts of the organization’s activities and works.

While at Yale, Lewis met Anthony Davis and percussionist Gerry Hemingway, two other musicians very much in line with the AACM movement. Like Abrams, Davis and Hemingway advocated a more compositionally-oriented approach to improvisation and sought to invoke elements somewhat foreign to much jazz, such as classically-influenced instrumentation and components of non-African ethnic music. Meanwhile, Abrams encouraged Lewis to delve into German philosophy and soon the trombonist began studying the writings of Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl, an endeavor which naturally appealed to the young trombonist’s philosophical bent and which contributed to an even more well-rounded world view.

Upon graduating from Yale in 1974, Lewis returned to Chicago where he remained active with the AACM, performing regularly with Abrams, saxophonist Fred Anderson (b. 1929), and other local musicians. During this time, Lewis began establishing himself as one most virtuosic and imaginative trombonists of the decade. “People should get wild on the trombone,”2 Lewis once remarked and his use of multiphonics, a variety of attacks and articulations, and his overall agility on the instrument were all hallmarks of a highly adventurous musician. Lewis also became well-known for such unconventional performance techniques as tapping the bell of his trombone with a mallet and bowing it as if it were a stringed instrument, adding to his already immense palette of sounds for the instrument.

With his unique approach to playing, Lewis soon became a much sought-after player for various artists within and outside of the AACM circle. Throughout his career, Lewis has made a number of recordings with Anthony Braxton, and some of their early collaborations included Elements of Surprise, Quartet (Dortmund) 1976, and Creative Orchestra Music 1976. Also in 1976, Lewis became a member of the Count Basie

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Orchestra, and despite the apparently unlikely prospect of a young, progressive musician such as Lewis performing with a group very much steeped in the swing tradition of the 1930s and 1940s, Lewis found the other musicians in the group - including Basie himself - to be generally accepting of his AACM influence and the radical approach he took to his instrument. "They let me play exactly how I wanted to play," Lewis told John Corbett in a 1996 interview with Down Beat magazine. "I'd try out making noise, weird combinations, playing silence. Anything...In fact, Basie came up to me and...he said: 'I really like all this experimenting you're doing. You know, that's what we did.'" The fact that one of America's most respected musical figures was able to draw a connection between his own values and those of the AACM was not lost on Lewis, and he regarded Basie's comments not only with awe, but also with a profound sense of validation.

That validation became even more evident on recordings made under Lewis's own name beginning in the late 1970s. The first of these, simply titled The George Lewis Solo Trombone Record (1977), was indeed a solo album in the most literal sense of the term: Lewis was the album's only performer. In releasing an album consisting strictly of material for a solo wind instrument, Lewis was taking part in a tradition relatively new to jazz and one which his partner Braxton helped to initiate. Except for one piece (Billy Strayhorn's "Lush Life"), all of the music on the album was composed by Lewis, and even the idea behind the album's "solo" label was stretched on "Piece for Three Trombones Simultaneously," which utilized multitracking to allow Lewis to become a full trombone section. Music critics considered the album to be an auspicious debut, including noted writer Stanley Crouch, who hailed Lewis as "...with Joseph Bowie, one of the two most important trombonists under 30 playing."  

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3 Ibid., 42.  
By 1977, Lewis - along with Abrams and a number of other AACM cohorts - had relocated to New York City and became immersed in Manhattan’s “loft jazz” scene where he renewed his association with Anthony Davis. Coinciding with this move was Lewis’s developing interest in sound synthesis. Working with synthist/composer Richard Teitelbaum, Lewis made several recordings accompanied by synthesizers such as *Chicago Slow Drag* (1977; released 1981) and *Homage to Charles Parker* (1979). Lewis was by no means the first musician associated with jazz to use synthesizers; earlier in the decade, keyboardists Herbie Hancock (b. 1940) and Josef Zawinul (b. 1932) and saxophonist Oliver Nelson were among a number of performers to introduce the technology into their compositions. Yet Lewis’s work with Teitelbaum emphasized the abstract synthetic textures favored by modern concert music composers such as Milton Babbitt and Luciano Berio (b. 1925). On the nearly 45-minute long *Chicago Slow Dance*, extended instrumental techniques and creative engineering blur distinctions between electronic sounds and Lewis’s trombone, Douglas Ewart’s multiple reeds and percussion, and J.D. Parran’s woodwinds (consisting of nagaswaram, baritone saxophone, and piccolo). *Homage* finds Lewis with Teitelbaum, Ewart, and Anthony Davis paying tribute to its title’s namesake not by presenting faithful renditions of Parker’s tunes in standard bebop fashion, but by realizing an approach to the blues idiom as conceptually innovative to the 1970s as Parker’s approach had been in the 1940s. While the album’s sometimes ambiguous sonic textures recall those of *Chicago*, echoes of the bebop tradition Parker helped to initiate also contribute to the music’s overall sound. During this time, Lewis also began incorporating computers with his synthesizer systems, albeit on the primitive level 1970s technology allowed.

As Lewis attained a more visible stature through his recordings and performances with other artists, he became a fixture of New York’s “downtown” music scene, situated mainly in Soho. By 1980, Lewis’s appearances as a solo performer and with Teitelbaum
and others helped to solidify his role as a leader in new music and lead to his appointment as director of the Kitchen, one of the city’s leading venues for contemporary music, that year. Though the 1970s, the Kitchen had earned a reputation which was synonymous with the rise of minimalism, but as director, Lewis sought to implement forms of new music which incorporated improvisation in various guises, whether more based in jazz tradition or modern European and American aleatoric practices. Among the artists Lewis brought in to organize concerts was composer/saxophonist John Zorn (b. 1953), whose own compositions often fused his considerable jazz sensibilities with the polystylistic approach of Russian composer Alfred Schnittke (1934-1998) and who later made a number of recordings with Lewis.

Apart from Lewis’s duties with the Kitchen, he continued to be active as trombone player on a number of recordings by other artists and as a member of the Gil Evans Orchestra beginning in 1980. As for Lewis’s own projects, by the early 1980s, Lewis had matured considerably in his computer music and programming experiments. A self-described “installation artist” (Lewis’s term for his unique programming pursuits), he did not merely use computers to create synthetic sounds, but wrote programs designed to alternately provide Lewis direction on his trombone improvisations and, in later stages, generate musical material in real-time based on his playing. Although Lewis’s early pieces using computers in this manner such as 1981’s Atlantic were sometimes interpreted as being somewhat novelty-based, he soon got his chance to delve more deeply into the new technology when invited to work at Paris’s famed Institut pour la Recherche et la Coordination Acoustique-Musique (IRCAM) in 1982.

Working at IRCAM gave Lewis the facilities and freedom to carry out even more in-depth experimentation with integrating computers into real-time musical contexts. Lewis had always strived to develop programs which could effectively model the listening process and in so doing, “respond” (i.e. perform new material) to incoming data (e.g. live
music, other computer programs) in a manner not unlike an improvising musician. Later
on, Lewis sought to “humanize” his computer applications even more by programming
them to recognize and improvise based on specific themes and sections within pieces and
even to develop a musical vocabulary based on what they “heard” other performers play.
At the heart of Lewis’s research was an approach to improvisation based not so much
based on musical elements such as a harmonic progression or motivic material but on the
more psychological premise of what Lewis defined as “the structure of the improviser’s
decision-making process.” ⁵ Because of this, although Lewis’s work at IRCAM was of
great interest to other musicians (including electronic music pioneers Salvatore MARTIRANO
and Donald Buchla as well as many of his fellow AACMers), he also felt that his research
would be important to those involved in the artificial intelligence (AI) end of computer
programming.

Apart for his involvement with IRCAM, during the mid-1980s, Lewis also worked at
the Studio voor Elektro-Instrumentale Muziek (STEIM), a similar institution in
Amsterdam. While there, Lewis became increasingly associated with Europe’s free jazz
movement. The free jazz style in Europe had its beginnings during the 1960s when a
number of European musicians, influenced by American performers such as saxophonist
Ornette Coleman and pianist Cecil Taylor, took great interest in the musical possibilities
exemplified by their work, including - but not limited to - unconventional melodic and
harmonic language, taking greater liberties with tempo, and innovations in their use, or
disuse, of the traditional rhythm section. Through the 1970s, free jazz in Europe began to
develop its own identity, incorporating elements of modern concert music (e.g. serialism,
aleatoric devices) as well as those of the black originators of free jazz in America. Among

⁵Curtis Roads, “Improvisation with George Lewis,” chap. 5 in Composers and the Computer, ed. Curtis
the many European musicians with whom Lewis collaborated with during this era were Dutch pianist Misha Mengelberg (b. 1935), head of the Instant Composers' Pool and a figure Lewis has compared to Muhal Richard Abrams; and British guitarist Derek Bailey (b. 1932), whose revolutionary approach to his instrument parallels Lewis's own. Lewis performed on many concerts with European free jazz musicians, and his performances with them are also documented on a number of recordings such as 1983's *Yankees* with John Zorn and Derek Bailey and *Fables* with Bailey.

In 1985, Lewis returned to America where he continued his work in the area of computer-driven improvisation. By this time, advances in computer technology, which allowed for more memory from fewer and smaller machines, and the growing popularity of the protocol MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) allowed for even greater aesthetic and technical options, although Lewis found it difficult sustaining a living as an installation artist exclusively. He also continued to work steadily as a trombonist, notably as a member of the News for Lulu group with Zorn and guitarist Bill Frisell. Although all three musicians were known for their innovations in contemporary music, the group’s late-1980's work - as heard on the albums *News for Lulu* (recorded in 1987, released the following year) and *More News for Lulu* (recorded in 1989, released in 1992) was characterized by an earnest faithfulness to the bebop tradition and to the compositions of Sonny Clark, Hank Mobley, Kenny Dorham, and Freddie Redd. Another major project involving Lewis was Richard Teitelbaum’s album *Concerto Grosso* (1988), which also featured Anthony Braxton.

During the late 1980s, Lewis also asserted his presence in the academic world, teaching classes at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia and the Art Institute of Chicago. His experience at the Art Institute of Chicago was particularly enlightening; “...I grew to
realize that I was an interdisciplinary artist all along," he once recalled, acknowledging a
tradition that extends from early African art through a principle evident in many AACM
groups and Lewis’s own interactive computer/performer interfacing. Later on, when
Lewis moved to California, he would be appointed chair of “Critical Studies/Experimental
Practices” program within the music department at the University of California at San
Diego, where his sometimes unorthodox curriculum - including a class on improvisation in
which a book by former Chicago Bulls coach Phil Jackson was a required text - are given
full rein.

Upon receiving a grant from the New York State Council for the Arts in the late
1980s, Lewis embarked on a project reflecting his increasing ambitiousness. It took the
form of an elaborate musical/theatrical production, *The Empty Chair* and was premiered at
the Kitchen in February of 1990. The piece revolves around the musings of an imprisoned
university student (played by Bernard Mixon), who had uncovered a scandal involving
members of the school’s administration, but was unjustly jailed after doing so. Dixon is
confined to a small section of the stage representing his cell where he imparts his
philosophy on the true essences of freedom and knowledge, accompanied a musical
backdrop created by Lewis on various electronic media and Douglas Ewart, who can be
seen onstage performing on a variety of instruments. Mixon and Ewart also share the
stage with two videographers, whose different perspectives of the action are juxtaposed
with footage of animals and insects in various stages of captivity and of people enjoying
the relaxed atmosphere of a picnic. The images are shown to the audience via video
monitors. While the audience for Kitchen works such as *The Empty Chair* was limited, the
production did earn the praise of critics such as Kyle Gann, who wrote in the *Village*

Voice, "Lewis has been working with this kind of video/synthesizer/improv counterpoint for years, usually driven by his own trombone. . . Allowed by a NYSCA grant to expand his resources, he's found in The Empty Chair an emotive focus for all that technology, and his MIDI systems are the waves over which a touching story glides. . . Water a brainy performer with enough money and his work will blossom into riveting theater."  

Lewis's other major 1990s projects have continued in the same vein as his previous work. On the programming front, Lewis has introduced his interactive improvisation program Voyager into a number of his live performances and a 1993 recording with AACM saxophonist Roscoe Mitchell (b. 1940) also titled Voyager. In 1993, Lewis also released his solo album, Changing with the Times, a multilayered work devoid of Lewis's characteristic electronics, but rather a dense mixture of new music and narrative relating urban impressionism ("Chicago Dadagram", "The View from Skates in Berkeley"), the tension and understated outrage surrounding modern race relations ("So You Say", "Airplane"), and, on a more personal level, the life and thoughts of Lewis's father (the title track, "Epilogue"). Lewis has also remained quite active as a trombonist, performing regularly as a member of the trombone quartet Slideride with Ray Anderson, Craig Harris, and Ray Valente.

Apart from his roles as composer, trombonist, programmer, and educator, Lewis is frequently called upon as a researcher to contribute essays on a number of issues. In 1996, the Black Music Research Journal published Lewis's article, "Improvised Music After 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives," a dense, well-articulated tome touching upon a number of topics germane to contemporary music and presenting forceful arguments in favor of reevaluating certain conceptions of that music. In that his essay

reveals much in terms of Lewis’s compositional and philosophical mindset, it is worthy of some attention here.

After stating his mission - namely to offer a history and critique of trends and theories surrounding improvisation across several traditions and idioms beginning after World War II - in the brief introduction, Lewis proceeds through eight sections successively titled *Bird, Cage, Exnomination, Jazz as Epistemological Other, Spontaneity, Improvised Music, Freedom*, and *Personality*. The first part - taken after Charlie Parker’s well-known nickname - recounts the impact of Parker as a musician and of bebop as an art form. In bebop, Lewis states, we find artistic innovation initiated by America’s underclass - black jazz musicians - which demands a new level of musical virtuosity not only in terms of technical ability but quite substantially in terms of improvisatory imagination. Such an innovation posed direct challenges to the European-based hierarchy that had evolved through the middle of this century in which the composer’s skill and craft - as opposed the performer’s - occupied the most venerated position and one to be chiefly remembered by posterity. This is not to say that the compositional aspect of bebop was entirely trivial, but the artistry of musicians such as Parker was vested first and foremost in their ability as improvisers.

In the next part of the article, Lewis takes on another central figure in post-war music, John Cage (1912-1992), whose compositions and views on music presented considerable challenges of their own. As Lewis astutely points out, Cage - much like his contemporaries in jazz - was also interested in exploring the improvisatory realm of music, but that is where any comparison between Cage and Parker ends. In fact, Cage’s disavowal of jazz is well-documented in his books, articles, and numerous interviews with the composer. Rather, Lewis credits Cage with introducing the alternate term “indeterminacy” to musical vocabulary and summarizes a few of Cage’s qualifying factors for that “indeterminacy,” among which jazz could hardly be counted.
As the next part, *Exnomination*, points out, while Cage and the mainstream (that is, white) music establishment were willing to at least concede the existence of jazz and to a certain extent, its cultural impact, a certain condescending and negligent attitude becomes evident when the idiom is viewed in light of “Eurological”-based modes which have arisen over the past 50 years. Drawing heavily upon the ideas of writers such as John Fiske, George Lipsitz, and Cheryl Harris, Lewis constructs exnomination loosely as the implicit assertion of “whiteness” (encompassing common Anglo-Saxon sensibilities) and by extension, its superiority within a culture, such as that of America. Exnomination in music is manifested in numerous ways, Lewis states, paying particularly close attention to trends in contemporary music scholarship. He mentions the tendency of writers to distinguish jazz and the African American musical tradition from the ubiquitous label “American music since 1945,” which connotes a supposed continued development of the European-based concert music tradition in isolation from any African American influence.

The subject of that aforementioned isolation is taken up in greater detail in the next part of the article, *Jazz as the Epistemological Other*. Here, Lewis explores the characterization of jazz as a more primitive, “other” art form by various European and American composers in cooperation with the media of the 1950s and 1960s. Lewis vents criticism of tendencies among white composers and writers to qualify certain styles of jazz as being more advanced based on their utilization of modern compositional techniques (such as polytonality and serialism) pioneered mainly by white composers. In this section, composers’ sometimes unsuccessful attempts to incorporate improvisation devoid of any African American influence in their works are chronicled as are the problematic issues arising in texts which have attempted to conceptually separate Eurologically-based “‘contemporary’ improvisation” from “indeterminacy”, both defined as separate from and independent of jazz and its influence.
Using the first four sections as his foundation, Lewis uses the next four sections to reconcile some of the issues previously raised. While the second of these sections, *Improvised Music*, describes modern directions in improvisation - including those pioneered by the AACM, New York’s “downtown” scene, and European “free” improvisers - which readily acknowledge jazz as a crucial inspiration and influence, the other three sections delineate aspects common to all areas of improvisatory art and contrast Cageian notions of those aspects with jazz-based conceptions. *Spontaneity* explores issues surrounding the thought processes of improvisers, which as we have seen, is also an area of interest to Lewis in his programming. While the Cage camp, Lewis says, measures improvisatory mastery relative to its ability to be perpetually original (that is, divorced from any preconceived ideas or styles) and finds fault with jazz-based improvisation due to a vast reservoir of musical ideas (or “licks”) that jazz performers often draw upon, Lewis, citing the theories of cognitive psychologist Philip Johnson-Laird, contends that the conception of a jazz improvisation does not result from merely stringing together such “licks”, a practice he likens to verbal gibberish, and that there is indeed within the jazz idiom the infinite potential for originality.

Similar issues are also raised in the section of the article entitled *Freedom*. According to Lewis, while Cageian improvisation is chiefly concerned with freedom from musical technique, effectively equalizing musicians of different limitations, jazz-based improvisation is very much about freedom through musical technique and valuing the musicians’ virtuosity. This section also explores the parameters through which that freedom is realized in both Eurological and Afrological contexts (for example, the use of chord symbols to guide jazz improvisation) and concludes that both contexts of improvisation are governed by underlying structures given by the composer and/or arranger, thereby preventing freedom in the most absolute sense.
The final section, *Personality*, compares the jazz-oriented aesthetic of "telling your own story" with Cage's desire "to find an improvisation that is not descriptive of the performer, but is descriptive of what happens, and which is characterized by an absence of intention." Having recognized earlier that the jazz-derived valuation of musical personality is deeply rooted in the desire of the African American to assert his/her identity, Lewis concludes with a quote from Charlie Parker that Olly Wilson has echoed in his writings: "Music is your own experience, your thoughts, your wisdom. If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn." 

As George Lewis continues to be a compositional and conceptual force in modern music while we head into the next century, we are reminded that over the past two and a half decades, he has always been associated with the cutting edge of musical possibilities, whether as a highly-skilled instrumentalist, as a composer, or as a programmer. Considering the justifiable esteem he obviously has for another great improvisatory musician, Charlie Parker, we can only guess as to how Parker would have reacted to Lewis's developments in interactive music; likewise, we can expect ourselves to be continually amazed with Lewis's innovations for many years to come.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

In studying the lives, works, and experiences of composers Olly Wilson, Anthony Davis, and George Lewis, one finds a broad cross-section of talent and output, yet several common threads also arise among these three individuals. All have currently settled in California and teach at two of the state's most well-known public universities. Wilson, Davis, and Lewis have each been recognized for their originality and innovation as composers, resulting in their numerous commissions, awards, and honors. There is also, however, the racial link and, in the case of Davis and Lewis, the generational link in addition to a number of other mutual connections - from Yale, to AACM, to New York's loft scene, right up to their current teaching positions at UCSD - which are of special interest. At this time, we will look deeper into their experiences and philosophies, and in doing so, draw new links between them and speculate on any implications for the contemporary African American composer.

One important area deserving of attention is the manner in which Wilson, Davis, and Lewis each emerged to become the revered composers they are today. We find that each composer is in some way the product of the social ambitions stemming from the civil-rights movement and an agenda forged within sectors of the African American creative community aimed at establishing black art just as assertively in the post-civil-rights era as it was during the Harlem Renaissance. By the time Wilson had entered college in the mid-1950s, the African American presence at predominantly white
institutions, while still in its early stages, was more widespread than in the previous
generation and he received his doctorate near the peak of civil-rights activism in the late
1960s. The time frame of 1955 to 1967 - beginning a year after the historic Brown vs. The
Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas ruling and ending a year before the assassination
of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. - spans a critical period for African American composers
who, like Wilson, pursued a kind of musical integration uniting the aesthetic modernism of
their white counterparts with African American musical idioms and ideals. Wilson and
other young black composers of the late 1960s - T. J. Anderson, David Baker, Wendell
Logan - were intimately aware of each other's common ideals and ambitions and had the
foresight to band together in many projects, resulting in several conferences and concerts
devoted to contemporary music by black composers and perhaps hastening a growth of
research in this area as demonstrated by the publication of the Black Perspective in Music
journal beginning in 1973. Likewise, Wilson had established himself among white
composers through his contacts within academia and his winning of internationally
recognized awards such as 1968's Dartmouth Prize and a Guggenheim Fellowship in
1972.

The paths Davis and Lewis took to their prominence - while somewhat similar and at
times convergent with each other - are chronologically removed a bit from Wilson's, but
parallel his in many ways nonetheless. Both composers inherited the fruits and various
social and political agendas arising out of the 1960s civil rights movement, including black
nationalism, a branch of the movement manifested in the self-sufficiency ethics of the
AACM and its sister organizations in St. Louis and Detroit. The AACM - as well as the
credibility both Davis and Lewis earned as jazz musicians beginning in the 1970s - were
invaluable to their visibility and success as composers, just as Wilson's reputation - at least
within the African American creative community - was aided by his alliance with other
like-minded black composers of his time. Yet Davis and Lewis, like Wilson before them,
were also recognized outside of African American circles, mainly through their work in opera and electronic music, respectively. In making inroads to America's concert music establishment with his operatic, orchestral, and chamber works, Davis had the advantage of coming from an artistically-minded family and of being married to an author, all people who contributed to his works in some way and likely had the contacts within arts organizations to make performances of his larger works possible. As for Lewis, his unique skills as a trombonist and as an electronic composer endeared him to the audience associated with New York's avant garde "downtown" scene and later, to IRCAM. It must also be mentioned that for both Davis and Lewis, their "traditional" formal training as musicians and academic experience at predominantly white Yale also mirror Olly Wilson's musical and social integration during his formative years.

One standard measure of any composer's success is the performance record of his/her works. Performances of Olly Wilson's works have occurred with regular frequency for some 30 years now, no doubt the result of his numerous commissions and his quite admirable prolificacy as a composer. When interviewed by David Baker around 1978, Wilson spoke of no difficulties in getting his works performed, no doubt in part due to the stature he had acquired over the past decade as a fiercely creative composer and as a respected scholar also. If the recent premiere of his Third Symphony (Hold On) in Chicago is any indication, Wilson's future as one of our time's most most sought-after composers is indeed secure.

Since beginning his career as a pianist, a certain body of Anthony Davis's work - solo piano pieces, small chamber works, pieces which utilize Episteme - has remained active within his repertoire because the composer is also a participant in the performance

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process. As alluded to previously, it appears that performances of Davis's larger works have been made possible partially due to a network of librettists, actors, and other creative forces surrounding the composer, whether within his family or contacts he made during his "loft years" in New York. For Davis, it appears that the main problem in getting performances of his works is one of available funding for their production. Operas such as X and Amistad are costly ventures for economically-strapped companies whose managers may cringe at the expenses incurred by mounting a well-known, historically-proven work by Mozart or Verdi, let alone a mentally and emotionally provocative work by a contemporary composer inspired by the life of a controversial modern icon. In Davis's case, this issue is also fraught with racial ramifications, which will be discussed a bit later.

Like Davis, Lewis is also active as a performer of his own works, although even more so than in Davis's works, the idiosyncratic nature of Lewis's often demands his direct involvement and participation. Though not easily classified as jazz, much of Lewis's work is steeped in a tenet of the jazz tradition as exemplified by Ellington. composing works to be performed by specific musicians, in this case, Lewis himself. This immediately calls into question our standard of judging a composer's success by the depth and breadth of performances, but it could just as forcefully be argued that as composers continue to probe the limits of technical ability and technological possibilities, the pool of possible performers shrinks considerably and execution of the works becomes more a matter of specialty than of general competence. In the final analysis, it may be concluded that, in the traditional sense at least, a composer such as Lewis is indeed successful so long as there is anyone - including the composer himself - capable of keeping his repertoire alive through regular performances of it. Yet we must also remember that this constitutes only one measure of success, and in our day of rapid and ceaseless creative saturation, a fleeting measure at that.
This brings us to another area of concern peculiar to the composers of this half of the century and that is the availability of recordings which feature one’s work. Although this measure of achievement may appear somewhat dubious given the capitalistic orientation of the recording industry, in our present culture, recordings account for a major part of a composer’s recognition by the general public and provide a medium of exposure transcending that of the concert hall. For African American composers, recordings are especially important for many reasons. First, since contemporary musical works are generally eschewed by all but the most ambitious and well-funded arts organizations, the availability of recordings of pieces at least partially alleviates the creative dilemma faced by contemporary of all ethnic backgrounds, particularly black composers intent on reaching a wider span of listeners: the threat of obscurity. Second, African American composers over the years have acknowledged the difficulties inherent in getting their works published by companies who question the potential of music by modern black composers to have a widespread impact. Third, as we have seen with Lewis’s work, not all music can accurately be captured in traditional score form - especially within the African American oral tradition - and recordings provided a means of documenting aspects of a composer’s creativity with a lack of distortion that a score alone cannot.

Not surprisingly, Wilson and other black composers of his generation were on the forefront of the movement to secure recordings of more pieces by black composers and a number of proceedings ensued at conferences during the late 1960s and early 1970s to help accelerate movement in this direction. In 1970, Desto Records issued Piano Music by Black Composers, performed by Natalie Hinderas (1927-1987) and containing Wilson’s Piano Piece among works by several other historically significant composers. Another early landmark project was the issuing of the Black Composers’ Series on CBS Records from 1974 to 1979, a 9-album set consisting of works by black composers ranging those of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to modern composers such as Wilson, whose
Akwan was included in the set. The music on the series was exhaustively researched by noted African American music scholar Dominique-Rene de Lerma and received substantial attention in the mainstream press. A few of Wilson’s earlier works had appeared alongside those of white composers on various smaller labels in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and although these recordings are no longer in print, it shows that Wilson’s stature and popularity as a young, modern composer was not confined exclusively within his own race.

As much as Davis may have disliked the “jazz” label thrust upon him, it did to a certain extent allow him greater access to recording possibilities than had he insisted on being recognized as more “traditional” concert performer and composer alone. While some of his early recordings as a leader and sideman are rarely available or out of print altogether, these recordings did much to solidify Davis’s reputation as a composer and pianist in the 1970s and 1980s. A number of Davis’s recordings made since the early 1980s with Episteme and other configurations, including X, are still in circulation and available on the Gramavision label, though still often categorized as jazz, undoubtedly to satisfy the marketing visions inherent in today’s recording industry.

Through his jazz credentials and AACM contacts, Lewis has amassed many recording credits as a leader and as a guest on other performers’ recordings. As is the case with Davis, some of his earlier recorded output (including The George Lewis Solo Trombone Record and Chicago Slow Dance) is no longer widely available in this country, although Homage to Charles Parker has been reissued on compact disc and Changing with the Times remains somewhat of a standard stock item for CD retailers. Of course, considering the interdisciplinary nature of many of Lewis’s works such as The Empty Chair, audio recordings could hardly do adequate justice, displaying an incomplete representation of his art at best. Given Lewis’s interest in interactive music made possible through computer programming, this author is tempted to contemplate possible future projects in which
Lewis's interactivity is projected through a new and different medium, perhaps the internet.

In the first chapter this document, we explored the history surrounding concert music by African American composers, highlighting the achievements of a number of gifted individuals largely rooted in an oral culture seemingly at odds with the written tradition of the dominant culture. Needless to say, many African American composers of past generations faced a good deal of resistance due to race alone, regardless of their unique talents. Bearing this in mind, we should take some time to look at how racism and discrimination have been dealt with by Wilson, Davis, and Lewis at this stage in our history.

In his writings and interviews given by Wilson, he rarely, if ever, divulges any details about his encounters with racism. The incidents which he does mention typically involve other composers or performers and date from the 1950s and 1960s. In his interviews with Eileen Southern, Wilson briefly discusses the difficulties faced by his black classmate Grace Bumbry and low number of African Americans in national composer organizations, but admits to facing very little racism on a personal or professional level himself. This may be attributed to at least two factors. First, by the time Wilson was reaching his maturity as a composer, a number of progressively-minded whites who sympathized with the struggles of African American composers were in positions of power from which they could aid in launching the careers of composers such as Wilson, Anderson, and Baker. Second, as Cetus proved, Wilson possessed a talent to be reckoned with in its own right, not merely based on whatever novelty came with being a black composer at that particular time.

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However, throughout his career, Wilson has commented several times on the misconceptions other black people sometimes have regarding his work and that of other African American composers. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, a certain segment of the black nationalist movement declared the only viable black music to be soul music by popular artists such as James Brown, Aretha Franklin, and Sly Stone (the latter of whom, ironically, led a racially integrated band). This led to composers such as Wilson, whose experiences and interests encompassed many musical traditions, to be labeled as “sell-outs” or “Uncle Toms” by some young nationalists. When composer and author Gunther Schuller described his confrontation with believers of this philosophy to Wilson and other black composers in 1970, Wilson responded, “Gunther, I would suggest that you say nothing when someone asks you this question [about soul music being the only true black music]. There’s nothing you can say.” This indicates an unwillingness to validate the ignorance inherent in this part of the militant view, a sentiment echoed by numerous other African American composers. Also during this highly politicized time in Wilson’s career, which saw resistance to white dominance in Africa as well as in America, he was often asked of how he perceived his role as a composer in relation to the movement. His response, as stated in his article, “The Black-American Composer,” is as follows:

“In conclusion, I would like to make a final statement on the role of the black composer in the struggle for Black Liberation. I am sometimes asked by students and others how I am able to justify my activity at this crucial historical moment. The question betrays a fundamental lack of understanding of the role of music in the traditional black community, both in the United States and in Africa. In traditional African cultures music is not an abstraction, separate from life, a distillation of experience. It is, rather, a force by which man communicates with other men, the gods, and nature. In this sense it is obligatory and vital to existence.

"The ideal I strive for as a composer is to approach music as it is approached in traditional African cultures. In that sense my music is directly related to the struggle in that it aspires to inform, motivate, and humanize my fellow men in their aspirations."\footnote{4}

From the earliest stages of his career, Anthony Davis has never shied away from discussing his experiences with racial discrimination. His desire to practice and study jazz and other non-European-based idioms while a student at Yale was met with much opposition from the school’s faculty and administration. His difficulties at Yale ranged from reserving adequate rehearsal space for himself and his groups to having the institution accept his music on the same artistic level as that of European-based concert music. "I think George [Lewis] and I both had a bizzare ongoing battle with the Music Department at Yale," Davis told writer Bill Smith. "At first I was trying to fight to get our music accepted as serious. That was really important to me. At that point I wasn’t ready to do any work for them in traditional music until they accepted me as serious and the music I wanted to study as serious. So at first I was trying get credit for studying the music I was studying anyway."\footnote{5} It it interesting to balance this viewpoint with Wilson’s experiences, especially in light of the fact that while at Yale, Davis was active with the Black Panthers. Davis later accepted music of the European tradition more wholeheartedly, though he maintains that his academic experience had little influence on his overall musical conception. "[My classmates and I] were very suspicious of schools. I think that was a very favorable environment for people who wanted to try and do different things - not the school itself, but the fact that everyone had doubts about the institutions."\footnote{6}


\footnote{5} Bill Smith, "An Interview with Anthony Davis," \textit{Coda}, October 1980, 7.

\footnote{6} Ibid.
Davis contends that racism also played a part in the adversity he endured later in his career after he began writing operas. This was especially true for the racially-charged X, notable not only for its expensive, large-scale production, but its explosive and sometimes challenging subject matter. Despite the massive success of its 1986 run at New York City Opera, Davis has had trouble reviving the opera since then. It has been theorized that this is partly due to the production’s huge cast and massive orchestra, which includes a highly-specialized group of jazz musicians. Yet Davis has maintained that it is his labeling as a jazz (read: black) composer - rather than as a classical (read: white) composer - which is at the root of his struggle. As Francis Davis reported in 1985, “Unlike their classical and theatrical counterparts, who enjoy the benefit of well-established institutional support systems, jazz composers must apply for funding as individuals, which effectively rules out the possibility of a jazz composer raising a quarter of a million dollars for a single project.” The problem is only further compounded by professedly well-intentioned but condescending gestures such as that by an unnamed arts company in the western U.S. which asked if Davis would be willing to perform a stripped-down version of X on inner-city playgrounds or numerous requests to score the opera for a band and small choir. Of course, the issue is also complicated by Davis’s thoroughly modern score and his choice of Malcolm X - one of the most influential and misunderstood leaders of this century - as the work’s focal point, and in the process, quite literally changing the face of the opera-going public. “The Malcolm X opera was threatening because I took what was a European form and made it into something else. There’s always opposition to that,” he told interviewer David Yaffe in 1993. “When City Opera performed it, Lincoln Center was sold out for every performance, and it was a 50 per cent black house every night. I think

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8 Ibid., 28.
that scared them. They didn’t see their normal people in the seats. That’s threatening to some people. It could have been very exiting because it could have been the beginning of something completely different in regards to the whole tradition of what opera is. But some of the patrons at City Opera are very threatened by what’s happened. That’s why X hasn’t come back to the City Opera. It’s funny because that’s one of the most successful things they did.”

While both Lewis and Davis were united in many of their struggles while undergraduates at Yale, as his essay in the Black Music Research Journal proves, Lewis has also taken the music establishment of the dominant culture to task for its attitudes towards African-based music. Like Wilson, Lewis rarely discusses his personal experiences with racial discrimination, yet his sensitivity to the issue serves as a basis for many of his works. The Empty Chair takes on institutional racism while the chilling “Airplane” from the album Changing with the Times explores the more subtle and covert misconceptions black people encounter on a regular basis. In this sketch, Lewis relates the story of an African American musician on a round-trip flight to Germany. Along the way, he endures numerous flippant remarks from an inebriated passenger, a stewardess who naively compares the musician’s sweater to one worn by Bill Cosby, (“Twenty years ago, it would have been a Flip Wilson sweater,” the musician ponders), and a particularly humbling experience in a German restroom. While there is nothing in the work to suggest that it is autobiographical, likewise, there is nothing to suggest that it is not.

Any attempts to categorize Wilson, Davis and Lewis based on the stylistic nature of their output may ultimately lead us back to a question mentioned earlier, namely, “What is black music?”, an issue which seems to permeate any discussion of African American

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composers. As we have seen in the works of all three men, if such a thing as "black music" truly exists, it is not limited to the realms of low, popular, or unsophisticated art, as is often portrayed by certain sectors of academia and the media, but even more importantly, it seems that the issue takes on a greater level of triviality when we consider the composers' attitudes toward their own works. For Olly Wilson, whose writings on the creative mindset of black musicians are quite revelatory, even more fundamental than an artist asserting his/her "blackness" or other ethnicity is maintaining a sense of creative integrity. As he stated in 1970, "Art is experience consciously transformed. If an artist is honest with himself, transforming his experience is precisely what he does, consciously or not."

He goes on to say that if the artist happens to be of African descent, it is only natural for a certain level of "blackness" to appear in the artist's work, but that level is not a uniform one, from artist to artist or from work to work. Other influences - including European - are just as valid and genuine if indeed the artist's experience reflects them. Therefore, we can conclude that for all of Wilson's passionate and convincing ideas about what constitutes "blackness" in music, he is equally unapologetic about elements of his music rooted in European traditions, even if some perceive those elements as dominating the African influence to the point where his music appears indistinguishable from that of his white counterparts. The European tradition is very much a part of Wilson's personal experience and he feels no more ashamed of it than the vast number of white composers throughout history - Dvorak, Milhaud, Gershwin, and many others - whose exposure to and fascination with African and African American traditions so deeply inform their work.

The issue of style and tradition is a frustrating and disturbing one for Anthony Davis, who has spent the bulk of his career fighting against the labels imposed on his music.

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While Davis doesn’t deny the large number of musical traditions that have influenced his work – jazz, gamelan music, opera – categorizing the final product is problematic because the blend of traditions common to many of his compositions coalesces into an original fusion for which there is no true precedent. In this light, Davis’s desire to be associated with the label “new music” – a decidedly broad and inclusive characterization – rather than “jazz,” “downtown,” or “classical” – labels often unintentionally tied to narrow traditions – becomes immediately understandable; Davis is well-aware of his uniqueness as a composer and that uniqueness is compromised greatly when accompanied by highly-specialized stylistic categories.

Like Wilson and Davis, George Lewis, while quite conscious of his experiences within a number of traditions, cannot be said to squarely fit into any one tradition at any one time. This certainly applies to the jazz idiom, but it equally applies to a somewhat new tradition: that of contemporary performance art. The fact that this genre is only two to three decades old and still taking shape and that Lewis is one of its principle pioneers puts him at a bit of an advantage in relation to Wilson and Davis, whose ties across several deeply entrenched musical heritages are often met by demands from conservative purists to declare one tradition as creatively relevant and stick to it. Perhaps due to its multimedia nature, modern performance art is very conducive to the inclusiveness and open-mindedness of which Lewis’s best works are so worthy, a fact which can also be said regarding the AACM. For over 30 years, the organization has succeeded in presenting a greatly expanded view of the African American tradition and in exposing artists who work in too-often neglected sectors of that tradition. In doing this, it has contributed to Lewis’s growth as a musician and has profoundly affected his creative temperament.

Given these perspectives on Olly Wilson, Anthony Davis, and George Lewis, we are led to infer what their individual and collective successes, challenges, and ideals bode for other African American composers and their careers. First, it would appear that
opportunities do exist for African American composers willing to pursue them, although composers are often compelled to make those opportunities for themselves. We have seen this quite clearly with Davis and Lewis, whose skills as virtuosic instrumentalists and consequently, their active contact with other musicians has facilitated an environment in which their creativity can be explored and has enabled them to present their music to the public. Doing this ensured the exposure so crucial to reaching and expanding their audience. It should also be mentioned that as a young composer, Wilson also maintained an ongoing rapport with other musicians and often performed as a bassist on his own works. Especially when surrounded by other willing performers, the possibilities for opportunities ranging from the instant gratification of getting a new piece performed to potentially financially rewarding achievements such as securing a grant or commission are greatly enhanced.

Second, the contemporary African American composer - or a contemporary composer of any background or ethnicity for that matter - needs to take on a diligent role in other means of promoting his/her music beyond a small circle of performers and listeners. At this point in history, this sphere of involvement includes the production of recordings as well as the publication of scores, both of which, thanks to technology, can be done with greater ease than in the not-too-distant past. All three composers studied here present a wide cross-section of approaches: many of Wilson’s early works, for example, existed only in manuscript form and requests for music from prospective performers were addressed directly to him while a number of Davis’s works are available through the large publishing company, G. Schirmer, Inc. Wilson, Davis, and Lewis all have recordings of their work in print as well, allowing them to reach listeners outside of the concert hall and perhaps in the process, bring about more performance opportunities.

A third point of interest of particular concern for the contemporary African American composer stems from the collective awareness of various musical traditions and the
tendencies to fairly or unfairly judge new works based on conceptions of those traditions. This continues to be a problem for African American composers for several reasons. One, as we have seen in Davis's struggle to fund the production of X, African-based and European-based traditions are too often not given equal weight in the eyes of the music power structure; and two, as we have seen in the writings of Wilson and others, the traditions to which we have become so attached are not as monolithic and mutually exclusive as we may have once thought or would like to think even now. Just as composers of all ethnic backgrounds need to be prepared to deal with charges of musical miscegenation from those who view each tradition and idiom as a discreet entity, scholars must begin to recognize a certain fluidity within the concept of musical tradition and approach music accordingly. If composers such as Wilson, Davis, and Lewis continue to lead the way in this pursuit, hopefully subsequent generations of composers can benefit from a more enlightened and tolerant music establishment.

The fourth and final point considered here deals with acute sense of vision and purpose we find in Wilson, Davis, and Lewis as musicians and individuals, an attribute which should inspire any composer. Each of these composers has balanced his creative growth with a strong awareness of personal identity and confidence in his abilities. We find this identity in discussions with various writers, in their research, and most of all, in their music and all three composers readily acknowledge the capacity of African Americans to produce art deserving of merit alongside the art of the dominant culture, putting all issues of idiom and tradition aside.

In closing, we can see in the lives and works of Olly Wilson, Anthony Davis, and George Lewis a standard of excellence which should inspire all musicians regardless of age, ethnicity, and experience and holds great promise for future development through the next century. We see in their works a reflection of sensibilities that characterize this point in history just as we see in the works of Mozart, Beethoven, and Stravinsky reflections of
the ideals characteristic of their time. If history is to be as fair to the composers of our present time as it has been to composers of previous eras, the inclusion of Wilson, Davis, and Lewis in that history is not only merely desirable; it is unequivocally necessary.
APPENDIX

SCORES, RECORDINGS, AND INTERNET RESOURCES

This section provides lists of works (including scores and recordings) for Olly Wilson, Anthony Davis, and George Lewis as well as web sites of interest. Whenever possible, recording release numbers are provided also. A good number of Wilson’s scores remain exclusively the property of the composer; others have been collected by the Center for Black Music Research at Columbia College in Chicago. The scores listed for Anthony Davis are published by G. Schirmer, Inc. As Davis and Lewis have also appeared as instrumentalists on numerous recordings released by other artists, only releases which feature their original work will be considered.

Olly Wilson:
Scores and Recordings
Prelude and Line Study. Flute, clarinet, bass clarinet, and bassoon (1959)
Trio for Flute, Cello, and Piano. (1959)
String Quartet. (1960)
Structure for Orchestra (1960)
Two Dutch Poems. Contralto and piano (1960)
Gloria. Chorus (1961)
Violin Sonata. Violin and piano (1961)
Wry Fragments. Tenor and percussion (1961); Recording: University of Michigan Records SM0015
Dance Suite. Wind ensemble (1962)
Soliloquy. Solo contrabass (1962)
And Death Shall Have No Dominion. Tenor and percussion (1963)
Dance Music I. Wind ensemble (1963)
Sextet. Flute, clarinet, bassoon, horn, trumpet, and trombone (1963)
Three Movements for Orchestra. (1964)
Chanson Innocente. Contralto and two bassoons (1965)
Dance Music II. Wind ensemble (1965)
Biography. Soprano, flute, harp, and percussion. (1966)
Piece for Four. Flute, trumpet, contrabass, and piano (1966); Recording: Composers
    Recordings Inc. CRI SD-264
Cetus. Electronic sound (1967); Recording: Turnabout TV-34301
In Memoriam, Martin Luther King, Jr. Chorus and electronic sound (1969) Recording:
    Oberlin College Records Vol. 19
Piano Piece. Piano and electronic sound (1969); Recording: Desto DC-7102/7103
Voices. Orchestra (1970)
Black Mass. Electronic sound (1971)
The Eighteen Hands of Jerome Harris. Electronic sound (1971)
Akwon. Piano, electric piano, and orchestra. (1972); Recording: Columbia 33434
Black Martyrs. Electronic sound (1972)
Spirit-Song. Soprano, double chorus, and orchestra (1973)
    CRI S-367
Expansions. Organ (1979)
Reflections. Orchestra (1979)
Trilogy for Orchestra. (1980)
Lumina. Orchestra (1981)
Sinfonia. Orchestra (1984); Recording: New World 80331-2
Houston Fanfare. Orchestra (1986)
Moe Fragmenti. Organ (1987)
Expansions II. Orchestra (1988)
A City Called Heaven. Flute, clarinet, percussion, piano, violin, viola, cello (1989);
    Recording: Neuma 450-79
Expansions III. Orchestra (1993)
Shango Memory. Orchestra (1996)
Symphony No. 3 (Hold On). Orchestra (1999)

Web site
www.otherminds.org/Wilson.org
    A brief and basic biography of Wilson.

Anthony Davis:
Scores
A Walk Through the Shadow. Solo piano (1981)
Wayang IV. Flute, clarinet, trombone, three percussion, piano, violin, cello (1981)
Wayang II. Flute, trombone, two percussion, piano, violin, cello, contrabass (1982)
Still Waters. Chamber orchestra (1982)
Still Waters III. Flute, cello, and piano (1982)
Hemispheres. Flute, clarinet, trumpet, trombone, three percussion, piano, violin, cello, contrabass (1983); Recording: Ryco Disc/Gramavision GR-8303
Middle Passage. Solo piano. (1983); Recording: Music & Arts CD 699-1
Wayang V. Orchestra (1985); Recording: Ryco Disc/Gramavision 18-8807-4
Wayang VI. Piano duet (1985)
In the Beginning of Light of Time Passing. Vocal soloist (unspecified), flute, clarinet, trombone, percussion, piano, violin, cello, contrabass (1986)
Parenthetically. Solo clarinet (1986)
X - The Life and Times of Malcolm X. Opera for vocal soloists, chorus, orchestra, and jazz band (1986); Recording: Ryco Disc/Gramavision CD R2-79470
XCerpts (from the opera X - The Life and Times of Malcolm X). Flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, trombone, two percussion, piano, string quartet, contrabass (woodwinds double on various instruments; contrabass doubles on electric bass) (1986)
Song Was Sweeter Even So. Flute, clarinet, bassoon, violin, cello, percussion, tape (1987)
Maps. Solo violin with orchestra (1988); Recording: Ryco Disc/Gramavision 18-8807-4
Notes from the Underground. Orchestra (1988)
Lost Moon Sisters. Solo soprano with bass clarinet, bassoon, piano, percussion, violin, cello, contrabass (1990)*; Recording: Composers Recordings Inc. CRI CD 654
Brass Quintet. (1991)
Voyage Through Death to Life Upon These Shores. Solo soprano with a capella chorus (1991)
It Was... Solo soprano with clarinet, percussion, piano, violin, viola, cello (1992)
Litany of Sins. Orchestra. (1992)
Tania. Opera for vocal soloists and chamber orchestra (1992); Recording: forthcoming
In This House of Blues. Voice, clarinet, piano (1994)
Dance. Clarinet, three percussion, piano, violin, cello, contrabass (1995)
Happy Valley Blues. Violin, guitar, piano, contrabass (1995); Recording: Music & Arts 5190-994-2
Jacob's Ladder. Orchestra (1997)
Tales (Tails) of the Signifying Monkey. Orchestra (1998)

Other recordings
Song for the Old World, India Navigation 1036 (1978)

* Also scored for soprano soloist with percussion, piano, and violin
Of Blues and Dreams, Sackville 3020 (1978)
Hidden Voices, India Navigation 1041 (1980)
Lady of the Mirrors, India Navigation 1047 (1980)
I've Known Rivers (with James Newton and Abdul Wadud), Ryco Disc/Gramavision
   GCD 79427 (1982)
Variations in Dreamtime, India Navigation (1982)
Middle Passage, Gramavision (1984)
Ghost Factory, Gramavision (1988)
Trio², Gramavision (1989)

Web sites
www.schirmer.com/composers/davis_bio.html
Publisher's site with a brief biography with links to works list, discography, reviews,
and other articles. Updated regularly.
www.rykodisc.com/Catalog/CatalogArtist_01.asp?Action=Get&Artist_ID=40
Ryco Disc site containing a brief biography and links to sites for the albums Episteme
and X - The Life and Times of Malcolm X.

George Lewis:
Recordings
The George Lewis Solo Trombone Record, Sackville 3012 (1977)
Homage to Charles Parker. Black Saint 2731-120029 (1979)
Changing with the Times. New World 80434-2 (1993)

Web sites
www.otherminds.org/Lewis.html
A brief and basic biography of Lewis taken from A ACM sources. Contains a link to a
similar page for Muhal Richard Abrams.
www.nwu.edu/wnur/jazz/artists/lewis.george/
Northwestern University radio station site consisting of links to Lewis's biography and
research material. Links not accessible on all servers.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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Reconstruction

for Orchestra

Robert Tanner

INSTRUMENTATION

2 Flutes (Flute 2 doubles on piccolo)
2 Oboes
English Horn (if necessary, the 2nd oboe may double on English Horn)
2 Clarinets in Bb
2 Tenor Saxophones (1 or both double on Soprano and/or Baritone Saxophones)
2 Bassoons
4 Horns in F with mutes
3 Trumpets in C with mutes
2 Tenor Trombones with straight mutes
Bass Trombone with straight mute
Tuba
Timpani
Percussion (6 parts, 7 players)

Player 1: Xylophone, Marimba
Player 2: Vibraphone (slow motor), Marimba (may be shared with Player 1)
Player 3: Suspended cymbal (14"-16"), Ride cymbal with rivets
(alternately, hold coins underneath susp. cymb.), Tambourine,
Train whistle, Large gong
Player 4: Crash cymbals, Triangle, Claves, Large gong
Player 5: Woodblock, Set of 2 Small Concert Toms (if necessary, bongos may
be used), Set of 3 Large Concert Toms
Player 6: Snare Drum, Set of 3 Large Concert Toms (shared with Player 5)
Player 7: Bass Drum

Piano
Strings

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