

**“People Get Ready” / The Future of Jazz:
Amiri Baraka and William Parker in
Conversation**

Moderated by Ron Gaskin
Transcribed by Paul Watkins

RG: I’ll introduce to you now, Mr. Amiri Baraka and Mr. William Parker. [Audience applauds.] This is part of the feature of this year’s festival, “People Get Ready,” and it celebrates a particular project which will be revealed here in Guelph at a performance this evening and it’s the music [...] particular[ly] the inside songs, of Curtis Mayfield. I wonder if we could talk about the contextualization of what may be considered a traditional music in Curtis Mayfield, and if, William, you could address the beginnings of this concept and we’ll start talking about this project and then we’ll expand to talk more about the future.

WP: Well, all music that people create—or that comes through people, the different cultures—is basically traditional. We have this thing in America called commercial music, or pop music, or music that is played on the radio that has kind of side tracked an idea of... well, you have like entertainment and then you have the concept of inner attainment and what dominates in America is entertainment—your pop music syndrome. But basically all music is traditional in a sense that it is coming out of whatever tradition the people who are making that music come from. The music of Curtis Mayfield for us—and I mean people of my generation, which is coming out of the ‘60s—when I was a teenager, Curtis Mayfield’s music was a soundtrack. It was a music that informed us about being black, black pride, the possibilities that you don’t have to be limited to being black; you could even be a human being, if you wanted to be. The music was very melodic, very rhyme-like, it had a groove, and you could be on the basketball court playing and

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someone was listening to Curtis Mayfield on the side, and they had a record, or a cassette, and it went along with that. It went along when you came upstairs and you might put on Duke Ellington and then you might put on Ray Charles and you might put on Curtis Mayfield and then you might put on Coltrane. It was all inside the realm or experience of Black music. It goes from, as Beaver Harris used to say, “from ragtime to no time.” What was the question? [Audience laughs.]

RG: I think you’ve addressed part of the fabric of Curtis Mayfield and I’m intrigued with the focus on it now cause we’re talking about time and putting it into a present tense and leaning forward with it. Now, one of the elements of Curtis’s music is the lyric and the voice and the song. And for this project, this ensemble, you’ve engaged Leena Conquest as a vocalist, and Amiri Baraka as a vocalist-poet, and I wonder if yourself, and, or Amiri, can address the vocalizing element of the new performance, or the new inside pursuit of the great Curtis Mayfield music?

AB: William said the music is as broad as the people are. I had a professor at Howard University named Sterling Brown, and there was another guy, A. B. Spellman, I used to think he was hip, we just heard Charlie Parker and what not, and he told us come to my house I want to show you something.

And we went to his house and he had on one wall—these were 78s, 45s had just started coming in—and he had the music arranged chronically by genre, or by performer, from: work songs, gospel, Jelly Roll Morton, Bessie Smith, Fletcher Henderson, and told me, “that’s your history.” So it took me about 10 years to figure out what that meant. I knew what the words meant, but I didn’t understand. What he was saying is, when the music changes it means the people have changed. When they go through their sociological changes and development,

their political changes and development and so the music reflects their lives and what's on their mind. So somebody like Curtis coming up there who was actually very, very popular. But the ideas that he perceived and that touched him... he created a rationale from that perception, and how he used that is the way we pick it up. How he used that in his particular songs, there were a lot of ideas that he didn't express in that song, because he had a specific use for that rationale, from that wide body of perception, from that even wider range of traditions, you see. So what we try to do is get into the meaning—the whole meaning of what those songs meant. Cause, the songs cover the world of that time, place, and condition. He says "People Get Ready." Are we getting ready for people coming and putting us in a boat and bringing us to the Western World? Are we getting ready for slavery? Are we getting ready to run away from slavery? Or, are we getting ready for the depression? Or lynching? Or are we ready to make revolution? That's what Shakespeare said, "the readiness is all." Whatever happens, to be ready, there's a change coming. Even while Curtis Mayfield was doing that, that music changing while he was saying that. Not only was Curtis doing that, but you had Trane, you had Albert Ayler appearing, you had all kinds of changes. The music is always about change. It's gonna change more cause it's gonna reflect how we change. What we think.

WP: I'd like to say eventually... there's a guy named Marzette Watts who put out a song called "Backdrop for Cultural [sic: Urban] Revolution." If things had gone a particular way... in the 60s you had Curtis Mayfield was alive, Marzette Watts was alive, Sun Ra was alive, Miles Davis was alive, you would have had... [Phone ringing and cuts WP off, audience laughs.] (Baraka: "That's probably Miles calling you.") [More laughter.] (RG: "It's a call from the future"). I had a dream once that I was at this rehearsal and I used to have a 1972 Dodge Dart, and I got to the rehearsal and Miles was there in like a yellow Ferrari, and he had two women in

the car with him, and he said, "where you going?" And I said, "I'm going to rehearsal." And then you know, Miles stole my car. He left his Ferrari, and got in my 1972 Dodge Dart and drove off. [Audience laughs.]

RG: Did he take the girls with him?

WP: Yes, he took the girls. But anyway, I guess my point is that before we—let me turn the

"When the people get separated, the music gets separated."

phone off actually. [Audience laughs.] Cause when these underground figures start calling you and if you don't answer, it's ok,

but when you do, they let others know and you have all the underground figures calling you. I think eventually all of these people would have come together and maybe even have done some collaboration. The music wouldn't have been so separate as it is now. You might have had Curtis Mayfield up on the stage with John Coltrane or Mingus. Cause we don't know what would have happened. Or have Don Cherry on the stage with Stevie Wonder and stretching it out. So unfortunately a lot of that stuff got truncated because the people got separated. When the people get separated, the music gets separated.

AB: Well, you know one reason for the separation is commerce. Cause when I was growing up in the '30s, and the early '40s, the big bands would have a rhythm and blues aspect to a blues tune, a tap dancer, a comedian, a regular singer, a small group—but commerce then wants to make genres out of each aspect of the music. When the music itself with the whole band—the whole big orchestra—had composites of all of that in it. Billy Eckstine's band had Sarah Vaughn as the vocalist, or Duke Ellington had not only vocalists and soloists, but also comedians. The band had a whole separate core of presences in it. It wasn't just one thing. And Ellington to me would be the great rationalizer of black music. Everything he did was blues in one sense, but he could translate say an old work song—like in *Black, Brown, and Beige*—and when he got from Africa to the South, to

slavery, the work song, to a swing, to a very modern thing; in other words, he would give you the whole chronology of black life in one piece of music. I agree with William that were it not for the imposition, again and again of commerce like it is imposing itself today in what we call jazz has even taken a back step to rock and roll, hip-hop, that you would have a music of unity. Say, somebody like Bartok who takes you Hungarian folk songs and puts them in a cosmopolitan mix, so you say, wait a minute? That's what Duke Ellington does, and that's what will happen again. The music comes together from sources, and it's split up for some reason or another, and then it will come back together. At this point... if you listen to *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*, my son Ras and Lauryn Hill made a record called *Shorty for Mayor* where they used old blues, hip-hop, rhythm and blues, and jazz in the genre, going from one to another, just like Duke Ellington would go from work song to blues, to swing, to modern stuff: it's different aspects of one expression. The reflection of one people. All those people are together, they're contemporary, but they're separated by either commerce principally, or some sometimes by education, sometimes space, but all those musics together are a great orchestration of a people's culture. See commerce for instance, forces the dumbest form of rap—I don't like to say hip-hop, cause I don't really know what that is—it forces that on us, when there is actually some very sophisticated and cosmopolitan rappers out there who are talking about some stuff that people dealing with hierarchy are always trying to address and they are addressing it too in another way. I mean somebody like 2pac at his best was a great artist, but he also made garbage based on reflecting the influence of commerce on his life. But that question of reorganizing that music still has to be done if you perceive it that way.

WP: You know Steve McCall, late drummer, he told me that Charlie Parker played for his high school graduation. So, there's a strange concept, integrating things, because you think you're gaining something, but you could possibly be losing something, because you are losing control

of your art and your culture. You've been invited into society, but you're really not wanted there. You can become part of us, but you can't be president, you can't do this and you can't do that. You can do this, this, and that. You can work as a porter, and you can do this, but you can't do these other things. But we like the way you dance, and the way you do this. So, can we control that for you? So not only do you lose control, but they say, "let's define it." So we are going to tell you what it is you're doing. Why don't we call it jazz? We'll call this rhythm and blues, and we'll call this that. But, wait a second: we don't think you can be shaking your butt and doing this in front of a certain audience. So, we got to get another guy who looks like us, to do that. That might be Elvis Presley. [Audience laughs.]

AB: It ain't Jackie Wilson, I know that.

WP: It's like the Indian saying, "This country is ours." And you've lost everything and I think that's what happens when communities blend too much. In a sense, Marcus Garvey—well he was talking about back to Africa—but, Elijah Muhammad was talking about separation and building a community. On those lines the idea of being separate might have gained us a little bit more control over the commercial aspects of the music. You might have seen... you know when the Beatles came out—I remember on Saturday morning, you could watch the Beatles cartoon, and then you go to the toy store and you could buy a Beatles' wig, Beatle guitar, Beatles' suits. Now, I've never seen a Thelonious Monk cartoon. Or a Thelonious Monk hat. Now Monk had some nice hats. [Audience laughs.] They could have put out a hat line with Thelonious Monk hats, and Thelonious Monk suits. So, something went wrong with the drawing board.

AB: But the point that was overstretched by Elijah was we were separate already. We were separate from slavery, from segregation, discrimination; we've always been separate. The question was control. People said you can always sing and dance. Let me be in charge of it. If it's all I can do, let me run it. Let me make

those billions of dollars a year. You know what I'm saying. If you say African American people make 570 billion a year—the 16th largest gross national product in the world. 15th is general motors. We have more money than India, more money than Argentina. The question is then, why are you complaining? Because we don't have control over that. I once wrote a letter to Duke Ellington's son who gave all of Duke Ellington's private tapes to Sweden. He gave them, he didn't get any money—he married a Swedish woman. So I wrote a letter, asking how could you do that? An Italian friend of mine asked, “why are you objecting to it?”

And I said. “suppose somebody were to take Fellini's works and give them away, what would you say?” “We'd lock them up.” [Audience laughs.] You see that's the difference, we don't have any control over that. Give all of Fellini's works away, that's a crime. But somebody can give all of Duke's tapes away, and that's not a crime? Just like I think it's a crime for Rockefeller and them to sell Columbia Records to Sony. And Colombia films to Sony. Even though Sony is Standard Oil of New York, which is still Rockefeller, but what he does is throw it and catch it like this, and he doesn't have to pay taxes. But it's still objectionable to me to give away the music of Frank Sinatra, the music of Billie Holiday... all of the music on Columbia Records, because that's our culture. That's American culture, not just Afro-American. So I asked a congressman about that, I wrote him a letter, and he said, “There's nothing we can do about that.” So if the Americans do that, then poor Afro-Americans, us complaining, sounds even more absurd. But it's not absurd at all. I don't like Sony to own Thelonious Monk and Billie Holiday, or Frank Sinatra. That's bizarre, but that's the way it is. It's just commerce. We'd sell you if we get ready to—no you did that already.

“There are musicians who live in New York who are trying to do what they do, but they're always in places like Guelph, and Paris, and Milan. But they're not working in New York. America is underdeveloped as an artistic cultural nation.”

RG: Well, as we were addressing the topic today, “The Future of Jazz,” does jazz exist? Other than as a marketing thing, we're speaking in very wide terms historically and in the present tense and looking forward, about creative music. So, do you think that jazz, as we know it and the marketing, the commerce aspect, whether it be European models, and North American based performers going to Festival audiences where

the money is, do you see that jazz has a future? Is it relevant for us to talk about the future of jazz? It's hard to define it, so should we bother defining it? If we're talking about creative music, should we talk about it in

absolutely indigenous terms, and about local performance? And William, I know you've been engaged in New York City, which is home, and maybe there's an expansion of the jazz community, and it's not just about music. And other than performance spaces, I wonder if there is some more expanded sense of community you could address here?

WP: New York is becoming the home of many, many music students who graduate from music schools. And they come to New York. Why, I don't know, except I guess they feel there is an energy in New York. They come to New York and they get jobs... or their parents are paying their rent, or they get jobs in restaurants and try to support themselves as much as they can. But what is happening in New York more than musicians coming is that wherever there is a blank space in New York, like a parking lot, they're building a building. They're building buildings all over New York. And then when they even build a building, they build a building on top of a building. What's happening is that it's all about real estate in New York. There is a music community playing music and trying to do what they would like to do, but you have to seek that out. The first thing you notice about New York is the concrete jungle. All these skyscrapers and you don't notice the sky. You

notice that you are coughing because of the pollution. That's what New York is about. There are musicians who live in New York who are trying to do what they do, but they're always in places like Guelph, and Paris, and Milan. But they're not working in New York. America is underdeveloped as an artistic cultural nation. It's totally undeveloped, and art is not part of the fabric of America. And the students, what they do is they have a degree and they go back into university and they teach and other people get degrees and so you have thousands of musicians with a master's degree, or a degree in jazz who've never played a gig in their life. And that's what's mounting up. It's up to them. When you say, "People Get Ready," it's up to them if they consider themselves the people, they have to begin to see the light, because they can't sit around and say I have a masters degree in jazz because as far as I know anyone who ever did anything in jazz dropped out of school. All the innovators dropped out of school. They did not finish school. I mean Kenny Dorham went to school and they failed him. He went to NYU and they failed him [in music]. They told him you're not playing your own tune right. [Audience laughs.] Talk about control. So that's what's happening in New York. New York needs to be revitalized with the energy of the young people. They've got to begin to come together and stimulate each other and not be so conservative. Like when somebody says, "Well how much is this apartment?" I said, "what happened man?" He said, "I found an apartment it's only two thousand dollars—what a steal!" I said, "No brother, that ain't no steal." I said, "That apartment used to go for seventy five dollars." You need to go back to the landlord and say, "No." You need to get all your friends together and you need to say, "We gonna go on a city wide rent strike until these rents are lower." You see, that's what they have to do, rather than just pay the rent and conform. They've got to get that spirit in them in, because now young people are way too conservative in New York.

"Music is going to exist as long as we exist" and "the music will evolve and the music will change when the people change."

AB: Music is going to exist as long as we exist. If there is some plan to annihilate the Afro-American people, then maybe there's a plan to annihilate the music. But even then you'd have to search it out in people's houses and shoot them too cause there'll still be diehards playing the music somewhere underground. Like even in Nazi Germany, when Hitler was running around, there was still kids—they'd call them the jazz kids, [the swing kids]—still playing the music. But the question is in the United States—like William says, underdeveloped. There are twenty-seven symphony orchestras in the United States; every major city has a symphony orchestra. But there's only one permanent orchestra in the United States that plays American music. You know, I'm talking about Wynton Marsalis and them play Afro American music. And you got the Boston Pops and people who will play, but they're not even in those twenty-seven cities. They don't even play Cole Porter or Gershwin. Well, they play Gershwin cause they play Porgy and Bess. But those twenty-seven cities are mostly given to playing European concert music of mostly people who have been dead for several centuries. That's what the American people think of as intelligent and probably Canadians too—I don't know. And they go to Opera and they don't understand the language. In Italy you go to Opera and people are selling popcorn and hotdogs because they understand the language. It's a different thing. But in the United States it's a cultural conceit. They don't know what they are listening to. There's still that kind of colonialism even for white Americans—colonized. If you say English, that still means intelligent. All you have to do is have an English accent and your IQ jumps a hundred points because England still represents culture. They still think of themselves as Uncle Sam: you know, the hick with the beard and the top hat. So, that question of the music—the music will evolve and the music will change when the people change. But what William was saying, and I agree with, is that there has to be a

cultural revolution in our country. The commercial culture has to be overthrown. We must have a cultural revolution. The kind of garbage that's on the Top 10, whether it's the best seller list of books—most of those books are American foreign policy, they don't have anything to do with revelation, or some kind of intellectual epiphany. They have to do with American foreign policy. Those books will not last a year. In terms of Black music... first of all there's not one writer on Afro-American music in any major newspaper in the United States. That would be like all the writers on European concert music being black. If we all had to write on Bach and Beethoven—I dig them, but I don't think black people are the only ones qualified to write about that. But to write about Black music, you cannot be black. It's interesting how slavery maintains itself in different phases. And then they just fired from the top jazz magazine [one of them] *Jazz Times*, the most conservative Negro critic in the United States: you know, they fired Stanley Crouch. And I said, Damn, if they fire Stanley, that means we're all in trouble." [Audience laughs.] None of us will ever get a job again. In the country that the music originated in you can't get a job playing the music. But you can go to those twenty-seven cities and hear Bach and Beethoven and Brahms any night. At Lincoln Centre this year it's mostly Mozart. Mozart is hip, but he ain't hip as Monk! I mean that facetiously of course. To me, I'd rather listen to Monk than Mozart. And since one of them is an American and one of them is many centuries' dead, why is it we have to be subjected to one and not the other? Or, why can't they be equal? Why can't the Americans appreciate their own culture? And American culture is European, and African, and Native American. It's a mix. You know we don't speak what they call Standard English. We never spoke Standard English.

"It is really time for the people to wake up. If you sleep too long, it's harder to wake up. It's a big mess, but the music itself—the pure sound, the words, the movement—that will always happen."

WP: I mean how come we don't celebrate Sitting Bull's birthday? Or, Geronimo's birthday? There's so many great chiefs—Chief Joseph, Red Cloud, Cochise—and you read the history of American Indians... they don't like to be called Native American because if you're a Native American you'd have some power. You wouldn't be living on a reservation. So, you see that Sitting Bull was a composer, Geronimo was a composer. We don't play any of their music. America has really been running a game on people all these years. It is really time for the people to wake up. If you sleep too long, it's harder to wake up. It's a big mess, but the music

itself—the pure sound, the words, the movement—that will always happen. Everything they try to kill, they can't kill the spirit. Because they are afraid of it. The music itself will never die. I think that we spend a lot of time trying to figure what something is.

It's like the committee on starvation: "We hear that there are some people in America who are starving. Let's hire Mr. Lorenzo Bergamot." Well he charges a lot... he charges like a million dollar salary. So they give him a million dollars to actually go and find out if there are actually people homeless and starving. He says, "well, I've worked for a year, and by the way next year I will expect a raise, and I would like to say, I think there're people starving. But let's go out to dinner and discuss this." [Audience laughs.] So that's the syndrome. A lot of commissions and studies on things, but we should take the money and actually try to do something about the problem. So, John Conyers said, Resolution Number 57, "Jazz is a national treasure." They said it was a national treasure, but they didn't give us any treasure. [Audience laughs.] If you go anywhere, and say the phone company says you owe such and such money, and you say, I'm part of a national treasure... the next you hear is a click and your phone has been turned off. So, it's nice that jazz is a national treasure, but we need some treasure. We need to have a melting pot in America... when you ride the subway you

see Polish people, Chinese people, Korean people, Japanese people, but they teach the history of these people in the schools, nobody knows anything about anybody else, nobody knows anything about the culture. I mean, I guess it's to certain people's advantage that certain people are dumb.

AB: They always have to keep the music lovers separated. They have to keep the people segregated and separated. Say if you have Big Maybelle doing something, we'll put it out with Pat Boone... we will not let you all dig and hear the same music, because if you all hear the same music, those ideas will effect the whole population. So when you segregate the music,

you are actually segregating the ideas of the people. This is why you have the Black liberation movement, which you can hear that in old songs, cause they use old slave songs for the Civil Rights movement. "Ain't gonna let nobody turn me round." That's an old song. But they could use that song in the Civil Rights movement because they've always been feeling that. If you let the whole of the American population be moved by the same music—like Confucius says, "If the people hear the wrong music the Empire will fall." What does that mean? The music has ideas in it. It's not just sound. It has ideas in it. If you look at the music that was being played during the Civil Rights movement, the Black liberation movement, that music had ideas in it. Whether it was pure rebellion, whether it was leaving this planet and going somewhere else... but it had ideas of rebellion against the status quo. What they have done is put a cap on that. Now, you have the few people who still want to talk about something, about transforming this culture who are always marginalized. You can walk down the street humming a tune absolutely stupid because of the beat: "I am stupid, I am ugly, I'm not goin' do anything." You'll be repeating that because that's what's in the music. And you know, that will be a hit. "I am stupid, I am ugly." [Audience laughs.] Now, the idea you

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can have a song that's talking about—turn *this mutherfucker out*, which is what was happening, you know. There used to be a time when you could turn on the television and see Martin Luther King. Or Stokely Carmichael, or Malcolm X on television. The whole idea of a radical art—revolutionary art, there are revolutionary ideas in art—that had to be a cap put on that. I believe we live in a fiercely propagandized and cauterized culture. There are great artists in every genre walking across this country. But chances are most of them will die broke and unknown. That's not coincidence, that's planned.

RG: Do we collectively see that we've got the strength to perpetuate a consciousness that can permit the survival and thriving of the revolutionary thoughts, which the music is an embodiment of? And, in the present tense, do we have anything which is akin to the traditional blues? Is there a new blues? When Albert Ayler was playing music, to him, that was the new blues; do we have an awareness of contemporary blues as a mantra or starting point for the evolution of the future?

AB: Well, I wish all these people would go out and start something on their own. Where's your revolutionary art gallery? Where's your revolutionary venue to have music in? Don't just wait for the university to sponsor it. Where are your galleries, your revolutionary theatres? Even if it's in your garage, or your basement. Better do that than have a cap put on your expression. My wife and I had a theatre for 15 years in our basement. We had some of the great musicians in the world play there. I mean Max Roach, Abbey Lincoln, in our basement. Why? Because we wanted to do something that was not cut and dry—something that was different that would stir people up in that ghetto. We once in Harlem brought Sun Ra, Albert Ayler, and all those people. [Phone ringing.] It's some underground people calling. [Audience laughs.] See they couldn't get you, so they called me.

[Audience laughs.] [Answers the phone call.] Hello, will you call me back in about half an hour?

RG: How far is the scope of the future? When does the moment become the future? How far ahead is the future? In this country there has been some funding allocated to a research project based on improvisation. I wonder if you have ideas about what may manifest out of a project like that?

WP: I know if you go to someone who has no food and no place to live and you tell them I figured out what improvisation was, I don't know if they'd be interested. And if you say, we got tons of money and now we know what improvisation is to the guys in Iraq, the people who just got their house bombed... I don't know if that's gonna help them. It's nice to know what improvisation is, you know. But to me, I don't think that has any value to people...

RG: Well, within the realm of the community we comprise now...

WP: The thing is, you don't have to know what it is to do it.

RG: I think it's about implementation...

WP: You can take... and I've said this many times. You can take a photograph of John Coltrane and you can say John Coltrane was wearing this shirt, and these sneakers, and you can find that shirt and those sneakers and you say Coltrane was playing this kind of Saxophone and you can find it and the reed and put it on, and you can transcribe all his solos and know everything he thought about inside out... but you not going to be John Coltrane and you not going to be able to play like John Coltrane. One thing knowing what something is, and [another thing] actually knowing how to do it. It's like either you're a bird and you know how to fly, or you can study birds. But people who study birds can't fly. It's a nice idea, but in the long run it's just an intellectual exercise to say, I know what improvisation is. Now, if you say,

ok, with improvisation I can feed the poor. With improvisation I can build housing for the homeless. With improvisation I can build schools for those who don't have schools. Then I might be interested in trying to define improvisation. I think money should be better spent someplace else, personally.

RG: Are there places where an undisclosed amount of money would benefit the perpetuation of the culture that we're addressing today?

WP: Give it to the musicians. Let them put on some concerts and then the people could come and hear improvisation and they'll know what it is.

RG: I hope that is occurring right here.

[AB asks RG to repeat what he said]

RG: I think improvisation is happening in the present tense. Let's take some questions.

Audience Member: Greetings. Mr. Baraka it's really an honour to see you and hear you speak, and also I want to give thanks for William Parker being here today. My name is Nichol Mitchell, I'm a Chicagon, and I actually spent 13 years working for Haki Madhubuti at their World Press doing graphic design. In Chicago I'm doing my music, composing and writing music that I try to use as a tool to inspire and to hopefully bring vision. My question for you is, part of the power you spoke of with the Black Arts movement was the fact that the music itself had a power in terms of its message and ideas. I think another power that came out of the Black Arts movement was the fact that the artists, whether they were writers, visual artists, musicians in the Black community, they were united and they had some type of renaissance in terms of sharing ideas and being able to express them in all these different forms. And I wonder, since I wasn't around when that happened, because I was, you know, a baby, I'd like to know how you know how that came about, and how can we make that come about again. What I

see now is complete segregation in terms of the arts. You have your painters over here, you have your writers over here, you know, and you have your musicians, and there is not a lot of inner communication between the arts in the Black community.

AB: First of all. Remember, that was not an isolated movement. The Black Arts Movement was a reflection of a larger liberation movement and the Civil Rights Movement. There were things happening from that period. You could start back in the '40s with the liberation of India in '47, and in '49 the liberation of China, and 54 Brown v. Board of Education, and '57-58 Montgomery bus boycott, and '59 Castro. So that movement came out of a world movement. So what we wanted with that movement was to create a movement that was genuinely Black cause we had been living in Greenwich Village—or at least I had been—and people would come up and say, “Mr. Jones, I didn’t know you were a Negro.” And I would think, maybe I needed an enema or something like that. But we also wanted an art that would come out of these places like this and go into the street and effect. That was why I was so happy to hear rap. Cause you heard young kids walking down the street reciting poetry and that was liberating until the corporations got hold of it and twisted it. And third, we wanted an art that was revolutionary. We were Malcolm’s children. We loved Dr. King, etc., but we were Malcolm X’s children.

Thus, we wanted an art that would help liberate black people. That was direct. We also thought like Mao Zedong who said, “We need art that is artistically powerful and politically revolutionary.” We didn’t want poster art. We didn’t want just cold-blooded propaganda. When Du Bois and McKay got into their argument and McKay said to him, “Dr. Du Bois you don’t know anything about art all you know about is propaganda.” And he said, “I don’t give a damn for art that’s not propaganda.” That’s what we felt. We felt ultimately, like William

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was saying about food, clothing, and shelter, that these were the most important things in the world and that our art—if it were relevant—had to help our people gain food, clothing, and shelter. We say it as absolutely functional in that sense. And the question is, “can you make a song about feeding people that’s beautiful?” “Can you make a song about building a house that’s striking and aesthetically powerful?” Maybe you can’t do that, but that’s what we wanted to do. We didn’t want to separate social function from the aesthetic function. We wanted to unify those. And we still do. I still do anyway. When they first brought the great Russian filmmaker [Sergei] Eisenstein’s films to England, they wouldn’t play Prokofiev’s music. They banned Prokofiev’s music. You could see the flat screen with the images darting across, but they wouldn’t let you hear Prokofiev because adding Prokofiev to those images made those images strong. *Ten Days that Shook the World* and stuff like that. It just shows you that once you can unite those forms with a focus on actually transforming society it has real importance. It’s proven that over and over again. I mean I’ve been to jail twice about poetry. I mean, who ever thought that was possible that somebody would want to lock you up about a poem? But it’s true, and I always wanted to do that. [Audience applauds.]

Audience Member: Hi, my name is Dr. Ellen Waterman. I only use that prefix because I have to confess that I am a university professor. And I’m part of the Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice Project. And I just want to take a second to set the record straight, maybe because you gentlemen are a huge part of the inspiration behind this project: your histories, your values, and I think we share very much the same kind of aims. Our project doesn’t want to discover what improvisation is. We’re not out to define improvisation, dissect it, or put it on the table and vivisect it or something. We want to explore ways in which improvisation is active in

the world to create social change. And a lot of our funding in our project is to work with community organizations, whether that is a youth shelter or an inner city exchange in Vancouver, whether that is artists, collectives... to develop projects that really explore the implications of improvisation for larger social ideas. We're really aware of the pitfalls you correctly raise in your criticism, but if we end up writing some abstruse kind of papers about improvisation and we haven't done anything, or we haven't helped anybody, then we would have failed—signally. For me to sleep at night as a university professor, I have to know that the work I'm doing is relevant to young people, that I am helping to prepare young people to make change in our society, and am working towards that change myself. So that is what our project is about, and yeah we got a lot of money from our government—how bizarre is that? That they actually funded people to take seriously radical musical practices that could model ways for people to behave with one another in this world. So, I guess that's not really a question, it's kind of a comment and an opportunity. I guess maybe a question could be: from your point of view, I mean you both do a lot of educating in universities, what do you see as potential, instead of a separation, a dialogue, an activism between community arts cultures and institutionalized arts cultures to make change through this music?

WP: What you're after is a spark and that spark may begin by just seeing a photograph of a tree or a flower, and it sparks something inside of you, and you start to think and feel a certain way and then you go from there. You find out about other inspirational things that will lead you on your path. Ultimately, that's the idea: that each individual will find what they're here for and go down that path and hopefully if you've found yourself in connection with the universe then that will be along the lines of revolution in the sense that the revolution is inside-out. In the sense that you need to be aware about how you

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treat people, how you think, all of these things... so you start from the sparks inside and then you move outward in the world. Everyone has a different calling. Everybody can't do the same thing. Not everybody is going to be a musician, not everybody is going to be a writer.

But everybody is here for something. I don't know anybody who says I'm here to do nothing—well, there is the guy on my block... [Audience laughs]... called do-nothing man. He's a very interesting cat because I've lived on my block for like 20 years and in 20 years he's done nothing.

But he says, that's what I'm here to do. And he's doing it very well. Then you find that nothing is something. Everyone has a purpose. Whether your purpose is to play the blues, or shake a bell, or write books or [...] poetry, or work in a garden, everyone has a purpose, and that's ultimately the purpose of art: you're not stating a war, you're not killing anybody, you're not doing anything negative—that's what it's about. We wouldn't have all these problems if people wouldn't do negative stuff. If you're doing something positive than you're a friend to the revolution. And those that can go to protest, that can start theatres, that can start orchestra workshops, then they do that. If it gets down to it, people that write big books, those work as bulletproof vests to stop bullets. Everything has a value. Whether it's the information inside or outside, whatever.

Audience Member: I'm very pleased to be able to stand here and listen to you talk. I wanted to tell you story of an African man who would sit under a coconut tree every day. Someone came by and said, “what are you doing?” And he says, “I'm making time.”

AB: He's doing what?

Audience Member: Making time. Creating time. In any case, what I'm interested in hearing you talk about is more about what we can do.

And William you were talking about the positive. What can people who have very little power in the world. How do they make power? And how do they get empowered to move forward and to be fearless in the face of the kind of the corporate takeover that has happened to all of these communities? What can we do?

AB: Well, you can't do it alone. It doesn't seem that you can do much alone. I guess you can do some things, but fundamentally you have to reach out for people who think like you think, or who are doing what you think needs to be done. You have to be able to try to energize part of your community to do things that you collectively think need to be done. It's futile to go up against these corporations by yourself even though artists might do it. The difference between an idea—like Lenin said, “people take up”—and make it something real in the world are two different things. I can sit and read Lenin, and Mao, and Malcolm X, but to actually make that real you have to interact with some part of your community whether it's a block association, or a listening group, or whether you are going to demonstrate about a thing. The problem with a lot of our communities, especially in the academic world, the world takes place theoretically and academically and is disconnected from real life. There should not be any slums in any community where there is a university. The university should be the lifeline of the world, not isolated from the world. All these great ideas that universities have—why don't we bring those into the community? That's the most important thing. I've always told my writing students, “You think your stuff is great. See those guys digging that hole when they sit down and get ready to eat that sandwich, go over there and read them a poem and see if they dig it.” You gotta get into the world and bring ideas into the world. And I think you're only gonna move things if you do it in some kind of collective situation. Even a band is group. So,

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what are the problems in this university? What are the problems in this town? What problems can you address in your field—in the genre you work in? The most pitiful thing is to go through the world and not even know how it works. And a lot of people go through the world and don't even know, like Brecht said, the casual connections of things. They don't even know how shit works. You have to find out how the world works: What are the causal connections in the world? And then you have to try to impact on that in ways that you see as positive. It's not enough to sit and contemplate the world. You have to actually bring those ideas into play in the real world. That's what I think.

WP: People are always seeing other people do things. A lot of people don't realize they have power. They put power into the hands of the politicians. We're a T.V. oriented society. We're always watching other people do things. But, once you realize you can make steps also, and you can do things. And when people see you do things, your friends, they will also do

things, and then someone else will do things and then you got a group of people. What do we want done and can we do it? Yeah. It's just being able to see where all the loopholes are. It's usually something that people walk by and don't even notice. You've got to train yourself to see. You've got to train yourself to hear. It's very important

to find out how to do that. You have to be able to widen your vision and open up your ears and you have to feel and build your strength and step out. You'll find out you have a lot more power than you ever thought.

Audience Member: I really love what you said about songs that will feed people, or songs that will build houses. Making the real connection between music and social change. One thing that I've noticed in Guelph is that music is starting to take a real do-it-yourself approach.

We've been putting together radical marching bands—using old buckets from the garbage and things—and I guess one thing I've noticed is that the way music is being made is changing really quickly. Do you think that venues like this, or the traditional instruments of jazz, which sometimes cost a lot of money, are you afraid of that change? Will music become completely homemade at any point? Are you afraid of the idea that jazz might never...

WP: Well, first I'd like to say that Guelph is a very special place. I was here in January teaching in the high schools and doing stuff, and they got programs here that they don't have in a lot of places. So, I'm doing a lot of positive things here. Second of all, I think you can make instruments, you can buy instruments. There is no worry about losing anything. You have a lot of people doing computer music now, because that is what they know. They're collage students who've never bought a CD in their lives, and they never will. They download everything. So the world in part is changing. But again, I think that the creative spirit is staying the same. That will always regenerate itself in whatever form it can take.

Audience Member: I only came up because I found two of the last three questions disturbing in light of what you two are saying, which although there is a lot of humour to it, I think you are saying, "folks read between the lines." The notion of control and power of the music, to me what you are saying is so obvious. So questions like, what can we do? When you have the power do something. I've been really looking forward to this festival when I saw the individuals who would be here, and the one example I am going to give, of all the artists coming here—you two included—there's a picture of a musician in what we call our national newspaper yesterday. And I'm saying, "wow." Why, a picture of this particular individual in this group, and not someone like either of you or Anthony Braxton? The picture

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of the musician *The Globe and Mail* had been in this city and Montreal about 3 or 4 times in a huge article. How are individuals who want to know about improvisation, who want to know about jazz, why wouldn't they have a picture, an article about someone like Anthony Braxton instead of... it was of Charlie Haden? And I as a black person will say to myself, well Charlie has been here, Montreal, Toronto, almost 5 times in the last 4 or 5 years. How is a black individual supposed to know about artists like Braxton? So the press has a lot of power. Those of you in the press, your one way is to promote black artists. When you see jazz festivals, whether it is Montreal or Toronto, you have to scratch yourself as a black person and ask, "Is this our art form?" Cause maybe

one quarter, one third of the musicians who are going to be performing, are black. [Some applause.]

AB: I can't hear well, so I heard every other word. So let me answer those words I heard. [Applause.]

Audience Member: I'm gonna add a little humour to that: I'm a lawyer and I like your response. I also listen to certain words I want to hear.

AB: Did you say there are not enough black musicians in these festivals? Did I hear that right?

RG: Maybe you observed that?

AB: Well that's true too. Well, the question is who controls them? I come from Newark, New Jersey. One of the worst communities that exist, according to the papers. But we're building a museum of African American music in 11 acres of land there. Why is that? I've been fighting for that since 1982. You observed that. Fight against that, change it! That's what I'm saying. Why are we doing this, cause we want that. How do we do? We organize. I went to a city

council meeting night before last to take those people to task. For the same thing, relentlessly, over and over. When people talk about change and revolution they don't talk about the colourless, relentlessness of organizing. Of running your mouth over and over to people trying to convince them of something you think is obvious. We've had since 1970, 3 black mayors. We put the last white folks out in 1970. We thought we were in paradise, we found out differently. But the point is this. We didn't understand the classes and class struggle. When we put those white folks out, then we had to encounter class struggle among the Afro-American people. We were Nationalists, we didn't understand that that was what was going to happen. So, in the last 37 years we have been fighting with black people. Now, you said, "well Mayor, we need a museum of Afro-American music." This is a black guy, he said, "right on, brother, here's the money." No, no, no, you don't see that. It's like arguing with Condoleezza Rice that we don't need a war in Iraq. She's a coloured woman. And that's a very hip strategy to give black secretaries of State, because instead of being threatened by Schultz or somebody, out of the plains pops a black woman, say, "Watch out Fidel, or watch out Chavez." So, the question of struggling—class struggle, as well as National struggle. The race thing is still there, because black is just a lower class. Even if you a rich black person, you in a lower class, until you say, "look at my money, I have money, I live in a mansion." But your colour suggests that you're lower class. So fighting the struggle to transform society goes National struggle, class struggle, it's intense, and it goes on and on. You have to find people who have like ideas who you can collectively struggle.

WP: Most people don't know what Anthony Braxton is about. They don't know what he does. They haven't listened to his music. Artists should not be put up against each other. [Applause.] Newspaper articles are publicity. If you look at *Downbeat* magazine and they have a cover with the three great tenor saxophone players on there. Now you know that's not the

three great tenors. Everybody knows that. If you speak to Joe Lovano, he'll say, "I don't know how I got on there." But it's publicity and that's how it works. Unless you, again, have your own magazine, your own newspaper, that can speak up for your agenda. Other than that, it's not gonna be about interest in what the music is, and what the art is, and if they think this is valuable. It's just publicity. It's not about the musicians. It's about the people who were writing about the musicians, and not even them, but the people who put the stuff in the newspapers. Why we put this one over that one? It could be any reason.

RG: Unfortunately, we got to cut it off. The session is officially over. But if you want to stage a revolution and talk into the microphone, I can't stop you. But officially, it's over.

Audience Member: You made a point about the conservatism of young people. But looking around the room there's too many old geezers like me here. Are there any strategies you have for trying to bring this music to young people? I find it hard to get young people to listen to it. Perhaps in this computer age there's more impatience, and this music requires listening. Do you have any strategies or thoughts for bringing more young people to the music?

WP: I can't really talk about it now, but two weeks ago we had a musicians town hall meeting in New York to discuss some of the strategies for widening the audiences for listening to this music and it just requires exposure. But you can't really push it on people; it's got to be in the periphery.

RG: I think it's appropriate we all stand up and demonstrate support for the conversation today. I thank you very much for being people who are ready.