

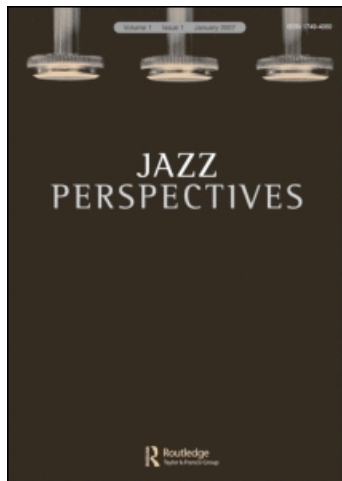
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# Race, Community, and Conflict in the Jazz Composers Guild

Benjamin Piekut

Jazz historian Scott DeVeaux details how the first wave of bebop musicians had to devise ways to fit their musical production into the swiftly changing commercial marketplace of the early 1940s. Players like Dizzy Gillespie and Coleman Hawkins took advantage of the growing interest among connoisseurs and record collectors in witnessing jazz performed “authentically” in that most holy of configurations, the small-group jam session. However, to capitalize on this desire and to reorient the marketplace, the musicians of the bebop movement had to structure their loose improvisations on short copyright-ready tunes, choose leaders for their otherwise egalitarian ensembles, and take the music from Monroe’s and Minton’s up in Harlem down to the new scene at 52nd Street.<sup>1</sup> Less than two decades later, Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor each provided an example of an adventurous new music that cast off many conventions of the “jazz tradition” pioneered by bebop. The younger generation of players who followed the lead of Coleman and Taylor extended bebop’s experimental ethos in various ways, and their explorations were variously called “free jazz,” “avant-garde,” and the “New Thing.” Most notably, these musicians discarded periodic harmonic patterns, the practice of reworking existing tunes, the formulaic split between soloist and accompaniment, and even the basic instrumentation of bop.

While the innovations of bebop had eventually been reified into a commercial and even predictable genre, the New Thing never gained traction in the jazz marketplace. Much had changed since 1940, but while bebop had never been a popular music per se, it did not have to contend with the juggernaut of 1960s youth culture and its exploding popular music economy. In this rapidly changing landscape, even mainstream jazz was struggling to survive financially. Nor did New Thing composers have the success of high-profile experimental composers, such as John Cage and his associates, who were more adept at defining alternative sites of musical production and gaining institutional support for their projects. For the New Thing composers, this comparative lack of support was due largely to a set of associations that linked black music with commodification and entertainment, the discursive opposites of “serious” high culture.

In this article, I describe and assess the attempt of one organization of musicians—the Jazz Composers Guild—to reorient the aesthetic, social, and economic networks

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<sup>1</sup> Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

within which their work was situated. The activities of the Guild, founded by Bill Dixon (b. 1925) in October 1964, took place in a social world under continual revision. Although the new black music was born and nurtured in downtown cafés and bars in New York's East Village and the Lower East Side, in 1964 and 1965, the geography of this music had grown significantly: to Midtown, where concerts were held at the Galaxy Arts Center (on West 58th Street), Town Hall (on West 43rd Street), and Judson Hall (on West 57th Street); to the Upper West Side and the Cellar Café (West 91st Street); to Harlem, where the Black Arts Repertory Theater and School (on 130th Street and Lenox Avenue) hosted performances and outdoor events; and to the more upscale West Village, where the Guild produced concerts at the Contemporary Center (at West 11th Street and Seventh Avenue). These geographical routes out of the mainstream jazz clubs in the Village mirrored the expansion and transformation of the socio-aesthetic terrain upon which experimental black musicians operated. During this period of shifting and emerging structures of presentation and preservation, informal coalitions and alliances were quick to form, even while many musicians seemed to float from one scene to another.

In addition to providing the first detailed account of the Guild's history, my particular interest in this essay concerns race and its role in creating both community and conflict in these scenes. While racial formation was a key factor in delineating the jazz underground itself, caught as it was in the space between the entertainment economy of mainstream jazz and the racially policed borders of both established and experimental institutions of high culture, different ideologies of race also mediated relationships within the jazz avant garde. The move toward self-determination always started with self-definition, and attempts at group formation based on particular models of racial or interracial understanding inevitably came into conflict.

### **An October Revolution**

In 1959, Dixon took an apartment at 119 Bank Street, one of three neighboring buildings in the West Village that were also the homes of composers La Monte Young and George Russell. Coleman, Cecil Taylor, Paul and Carla Bley, and John Benson Brooks all lived a short walk away, thereby making this one of the most concentrated collections of avant-garde musicians in the city. From 1961 to 1963, when Dixon co-led a quartet with tenor saxophonist Archie Shepp, and in the years before, Dixon rarely played at an established club. Instead, like other musicians in the jazz underground, he took advantage of the more open network of cafés and coffeehouses that had sprung up around Greenwich Village. These establishments included the Four Steps, the White Whale, Café Avital, Le Metro, Harout's, and Café Roué and Take 2, where Dixon had established the music policies.<sup>2</sup> Major clubs presented nationally established popular

<sup>2</sup> Ben Young, *Dixonia: A Bio-Discography of Bill Dixon* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 1–66. See also LeRoi Jones (a.k.a. Amiri Baraka), "New York Loft and Coffee Shop Jazz," in *Black Music* (New York: William Morrow, 1963; repr., 1967), 92–98.

acts like the ensembles of Woody Herman, Dizzy Gillespie, Red Allen, or Gerry Mulligan, in addition to other entertainers such as Nina Simone, Muddy Waters, or comedian Dick Gregory. Off-night and afternoon dates at such establishments were scarce, so up-and-coming jazz musicians honed their craft at small cafés, where they could be assured of steady work and plenty of appearances.<sup>3</sup>

Dixon began to program concerts at the Cellar Café in the spring of 1964. The Café was located below street-level on West 91st Street, and Dixon would stop in from time to time for a cup of coffee, soon befriending the co-owner of the establishment, Peter Sabino.<sup>4</sup> Initially, Dixon produced concerts on Sunday afternoons. “I had one rule,” Dixon recalls, “Anyone could play at the Cellar, as long as they weren’t playing any other place. So right away, we got a reputation for a certain kind of music.”<sup>5</sup> Trombonist Roswell Rudd also notes the reputation enjoyed by the Cellar during this period. Of the audience that frequented these shows, he remarked, “You know, they could pay their money and take their chances at the commercial ... clubs. But at least here, they were guaranteed a taste of the unexpected, the unforeseen.”<sup>6</sup> Between May and September, Dixon programmed nearly twenty Sunday afternoon concerts at the Cellar, including performances by pianists Sun Ra and Paul Bley, saxophonists Pharoah Sanders and Albert Ayler, drummers Rashied Ali, Sunny Murray and Paul Motian, clarinetist Jimmy Giuffre, bassists Barre Phillips and Lewis Worrell, and the Free Form Improvisation Ensemble (flutist Jon Winter, saxophonist Gary William Friedman, pianist Burton Greene, bassist Alan Silva, and drummer Clarence Walker).<sup>7</sup>

Buoyed by the success of their weekly concerts (which were never reviewed in the jazz press), and by newly passed state legislation that made it easier to obtain a liquor license, Dixon and Sabino decided to go into business together in the late summer of 1964.<sup>8</sup> Their financial backing fell through shortly thereafter, but the pair continued to plan the four-day festival that would announce their opening. Sabino came up with a title, “The October Revolution in Jazz,” that was meant only to communicate the date and musical significance of the concert series, and not any Communist sympathies.<sup>9</sup> Dixon organized the concert logistics—selecting and contacting the musicians, working out the schedule, and placing advertisements in the *Village Voice*, the *Villager*, and

<sup>3</sup> They often played for free or sat in with a house-supplied rhythm section. Taylor, Shepp, Mario, Brown, and Albert Ayler all performed in coffeehouses in the early 1960s.

<sup>4</sup> Bill Dixon, interview by the author, Bennington, VT, August 15, 2006. Young pinpoints their initial meeting to April 14, 16, or 18. See Young, *Dixonia*, 339–40.

<sup>5</sup> Dixon, interview by the author, August 15, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Roswell Rudd, interview by the author, New York City, August 9, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Young, *Dixonia*, 341–343.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Gansberg, “Moreland Group Ends Its Study on Reform of State Liquor Law,” *New York Times*, May 24, 1964, 92. This legislation included an easing of the requirement that alcohol-serving establishments must have a full kitchen.

<sup>9</sup> Dixon insists that there were no Communist undertones. Dixon, interview by the author, August 15, 2006. This did not stop some from making the connection anyway. See Rongway Fyter (pseud.), “New Thing Blues—or Reds,” letter to the editor, *Down Beat*, June 3, 1965, 6: “The ‘new thing’ has overthrown by force the basic elements of jazz, if not all of music—namely melody, harmony, and rhythm. Therefore the logical name for it will be ‘communistic jazz.’”

the *Columbia Daily Spectator*.<sup>10</sup> There was also a brief mention of the event in the October 8 issue of *Down Beat*.<sup>11</sup>

The concert series, held on four nights beginning October 1, was a great success. Dixon credits this accomplishment to the low price of admission (\$1), the convivial atmosphere that they had created at the Cellar in the months before, and the enthusiastic word-of-mouth endorsements that their concerts had garnered. In 2006, the pianist Burton Greene recalled this latter phenomenon: “If somebody did something creative, everybody knew about it. They didn’t have to get on the phone or anything; there was a strong grapevine. We all turned up and supported each other in one way or another at the gigs.”<sup>12</sup> Estimates and memories of the audience size varied, but the total number in attendance was generally agreed to have been about 700, and those in attendance enjoyed the performances of about forty ensembles and solo acts.<sup>13</sup>

With the exceptions of Sun Ra, Paul Bley, and Jimmy Giuffre, everyone on the festival was relatively unknown.<sup>14</sup> The musicians well known today—Rudd, Worrell, Silva, Greene, John Tchicai, Milford Graves, Giuseppi Logan, Don Pullen, and Joe Maneri—were then young, unfamiliar performers who had yet to record or play in any of the mainstream clubs. Dixon wanted to be sure that the 75-odd musicians on the series could not be accused of riding on the coattails of more-established players like Ayler, Shepp, Taylor, or Coleman. But in spite of the obscurity of most of its performers, and a location far removed from the energy of Greenwich Village, the October Revolution drew substantial crowds, as well as several notable figures from the New York jazz scene, including Taylor, Shepp, Coleman, Gil Evans, Andrew Hill, Village Gate owner Art D’Lugoff, and poet/critic Amiri Baraka (who was then known as LeRoi Jones).<sup>15</sup> Writer A. B. Spellman observed: “Almost everybody who’s doing anything at all in the way of *avant-garde* jazz in New York passed through the Cellar during these programs, if not to play, then to participate in the panels or to

<sup>10</sup> The first advertisement placed in the *Village Voice* referred to the “1st Annual Contemporary Music Festival devoted exclusively to talented musicians and composers.” See *Village Voice*, September 17, 1964, 14; October 1, 1964, 18; and September 24, 1964, 24. The advertisement in the *Columbia Daily Spectator* announced an “International Jazz Festival.” See *Columbia Daily Spectator*, October 1, 1964, 4. The series was also included in the concert listings of the *New York Times*.

<sup>11</sup> “Strictly Ad Lib,” *Down Beat*, October 8, 1964, 43.

<sup>12</sup> Burton Greene, telephone interview by the author, July 12, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Williams estimated that the room held 90 people (Martin Williams and Dan Morgenstern, “The October Revolution: Two Views of the Avant Garde in Action,” *Down Beat*, November 19, 1964, 15), while Dixon remembered 50 or 75 (Dixon, interview by the author, August 15, 2006), and Val Wilmer put the number at 65 (Val Wilmer, *As Serious as Your Life: John Coltrane and Beyond* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1992 [1977]), 213). On the total number of performers, see Young, *Dixonia*, 345–347.

<sup>14</sup> The *New York Times* critic John Wilson wrote: “Only one widely known jazzman took part—Jimmy Giuffre, the clarinetist.” See Wilson, “Dig That Free-Form Jazz,” *New York Times*, January 24, 1965, X13.

<sup>15</sup> Many of these luminaries were also present to participate in nightly panel discussions, which was a clever way of bringing famous names to the event without compromising its dedication to featuring unknown artists. Williams reports that Evans, Coleman, Hill, Taylor, Shepp, and Ken McIntyre were there. Dixon remembers noticing D’Lugoff and Baraka, as well as cellist Charlotte Moorman. Vocalist Patty Waters was also a frequent visitor to the Cellar. Milford Graves recalls having a pleasant interaction with drummer Tony Williams. Milford Graves, interview by the author, Jamaica, NY, January 23, 2007.

listen.”<sup>16</sup> The critics Martin Williams and Dan Morgenstern were also present to review the event for *Down Beat*.

In his recollection of the event, Rudd describes a mood that combined celebration and intensity in equal measure: “I just remember it ...[being] very professional. The players were seriously digging in.... Serious business.... And I don’t mean to make it sound like a funeral. It was anything but. What I mean by the word ‘focused’ is a lot of humor, good feeling, [and a] certain amount of good competitiveness. My recollection is very positive.”<sup>17</sup> In a *Columbia Daily Spectator* review of the festival, Dan Carlinsky described the scene: “The Cellar is not really a café, but a small concert hall with sandwiches and coffee. It is not really smoke-filled, and the clink of paper coffee-cups cannot be heard too distinctly.”<sup>18</sup> This characterization of the site as a small concert hall goes straight to the issue that Dixon and the other musicians were attempting to address: how to create space outside of the jazz club entertainment economy for musicians and composers who had been denied such opportunities by a racial taxonomy of musical traditions. Indeed, Dixon made clear his desire to escape the automatic labeling of this music as “jazz”: an advanced notice in the *Village Voice* referred to the October Revolution as “A Festival of Contemporary Music, both jazz and non-jazz, to focus attention on a segment of the ‘creative underground.’”<sup>19</sup>

The feelings of mutual support and goodwill seem to have collided with the equally strong tendency toward disagreement during the panel discussions that closed the program each evening.<sup>20</sup> There were four, with the themes “Jim Crow and Crow Jim,” “The Economics of Jazz,” “The Rise of Folk Music and the Decline of Jazz,” and “Jazz Composition.”<sup>21</sup> Dixon moderated each of the panels. It remains unknown which individuals appeared on each night’s discussion, but the complete list included Taylor, Shepp, Hill, Sun Ra, saxophonists Steve Lacy and Hugh Glover, composer and band-leader Rod Levitt, composer and producer Teo Macero, composer and critic Don Heckman, filmmaker and writer Herb Dexter, writer Rob Reisner, and critics Nat Hentoff and Williams.<sup>22</sup> Dixon recalls that the discussion touched upon such topics as

<sup>16</sup> Spellman, “Jazz at the Judson,” *The Nation*, February 8, 1965, 149.

<sup>17</sup> Rudd, interview by the author, August 9, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Dan Carlinsky, “Jazz in a Cellar,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, October 7, 1964, 2.

<sup>19</sup> “Music at Café,” *Village Voice*, September 24, 1964, 13. As Silva remarked, “Before [the FFIE] joined the Jazz Composers Guild, this group had many concerts on what [the FFIE] would call the contemporary music circuit. I assumed that we were working on that circuit.... When Bill Dixon asked us to be part of the October Revolution at the Cellar Café, we had to ask ourselves whether we wanted to be in the ‘jazz’ sector or the ‘contemporary music’ sector.” See Silva’s comments in the liner notes to *The Free Form Improvisation Ensemble*, Cadence Jazz Records CJR 1094, n.d. [2003?], compact disc.

<sup>20</sup> To avoid noise complaints, the music had to stop each night at 11:00 p.m. or midnight (accounts varied).

<sup>21</sup> Morgenstern, “The October Revolution,” 15; Dixon, interview by the author, August 15, 2006; Rudd, interview by the author, August 9, 2006.

<sup>22</sup> This list comes from Morgenstern, “The October Revolution,” 15, and is corroborated by Young, *Dixonia*, 344. Dixon also remembers Ira Gitler in attendance on one of the panels, while the advertisement in the *Village Voice* adds Ken McIntyre, R. D. Harlan, Linda Solomon, Carla Bley, and Hall Overton. Gary William Friedman, who attended (and played on) the final night of the event, recalls listening to Carla Bley discussing the philosophical aspects of her compositional practice. Gary William Friedman, interview by the author, New York City, October 5, 2006. In an article in that week’s *Village Voice*, Hentoff wrote that he was on a panel with Taylor. See “Reformer Ed and Cecil Taylor,” *Village Voice*, October 8, 1964, 5.

the New York Musicians' Union Local 802's disregard for jazz musicians, the difficulty of landing a recording contract or a playing date at one of the major clubs, the exclusion of African American musicians from the lucrative market in television music and commercial jingles, and the white monopoly on well-paying club dates in the Catskills, as well as Broadway and off-Broadway shows. "Those were the things [under] discussion—work and work privileges," Dixon reports.<sup>23</sup> The jazz musician of any color was constantly negotiating unfavorable working conditions, but the conversation also turned to how black players were at an even larger disadvantage. When a jazz musician was white, "if he could read well enough and knew someone like that, he could work with the New York Philharmonic tomorrow, and then play a jazz club. . . . The black one was always black, no matter how you cut the thing."<sup>24</sup> The subject of race was not restricted to the "Jim Crow and Crow Jim" panel alone; indeed, Dixon remembers that "race later raised its head in all of them."<sup>25</sup> This was perhaps inevitable in the fall of 1964, after the Harlem riot, Freedom Summer, and the murder of three civil rights workers in August of that year, but the focus on race was also due to the fact that the new music was increasingly identified with black nationalism. Dixon remembers the mood of the panel discussions as being "heated" and "impassioned," even though the audience was almost exclusively white.

Many years later, Dixon told Ben Young: "I did the October Revolution completely by myself . . . for a simple reason. All these writers . . . were telling me that this music I saw wasn't worth anything. . . [, but] I knew people could be interested in anything if it was presented to them in the proper way."<sup>26</sup> Stepping into a curatorial role, Dixon was trying to advance his music and position as a composer by organizing and presenting a broad spectrum of work by his contemporaries. The fact that so many of the participants in the Revolution were unknown at the time ironically served to strengthen the feeling that this was a groundswell movement involving potentially hundreds of other unknown composers.

When asked if the concert series had been a galvanizing force, Rudd replied: "Oh yeah, I think there was . . . a galvanization, definitely. . . . Formalize something which is a coffeeshop, loftspace, underground, storefront phenomenon—you know, put an announcement out there, and let the public know where they can find it, and that it exists."<sup>27</sup> The Revolution also jumpstarted the careers of several musicians. Rudd, Greene, Tchicai, Worrell, Graves, Silva, and Logan would each go on to receive recording contracts, more prominent gigs, and some measure of critical attention within a few

<sup>23</sup> Dixon, interview by the author, August 15, 2006. For one example of a commercial jingle, see "Jax Beer Commercial," Patty Waters, *You Thrill Me: A Musical Odyssey, 1960–1979*, Water 137, 2005, compact disc. Graves also mentioned the preferential treatment given to white musicians by the Local 802 in regard to playing dates in the Catskills. Graves, interview by the author.

<sup>24</sup> This was the case with the bassist David Izenzon, for example. Buell Neidlinger was the principal bassist for the Boston Symphony. Friedman, who played alto saxophone for the Free Form Improvisation Ensemble, had been a composition student at Columbia University, where he worked with the composer Vladimir Ussachevsky in the Columbia-Princeton electronic music studios, and also studied privately with Hall Overton.

<sup>25</sup> Dixon, interview by the author, August 15, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Young, *Dixonia*, 344.

<sup>27</sup> Rudd, interview by the author, August 9, 2006.

years. Carla Bley, who wrote much of the music that her husband Paul Bley played with his quintet, and who was also unknown at the time, would soon be invited to join the Jazz Composers Guild. The Guild gave her the opportunity to write for a large ensemble, and her leadership of this group would later lead to the wider success of the Jazz Composers Orchestra, which was co-led with Michael Mantler. Dixon himself would release the album *Intents and Purposes* for RCA in 1967, about five years after his first discs on Savoy.

On November 19, 1964, *Down Beat* ran the two reviews by Morgenstern and Williams. Morgenstern's conflicted report on the event mixed grudging acceptance of the concerts' success with a nuanced understanding of the aesthetic and socio-cultural forces at work in the music. He conceded that Dixon "had proven his point," that the Revolution "has demonstrated that there is an audience for the new music."<sup>28</sup> The critic tempered his response though by suggesting that the impressive attendance was due to the "uncritical acceptance" of the "young and easily swayed." While reserved in his praise for the event, Morgenstern was very perceptive about the category problems that this new avant garde presented to the field of musical production in 1964. The new jazz, he wrote, "is a form of 20th-century 'art music' rather than that unique blend of popular and 'true' art that has been ... jazz as we know it." This music, he continued, deserves to be subsidized by foundations or government grants, and spared from the need to compete with mainstream jazz artists like Dave Brubeck and Cannonball Adderley in the marketplace.

Williams was more sanguine in his appraisal of the event, and he noted the impressive size and attentiveness of the audience, as well as the quality of the music. He even went so far as to instruct club owners that they "had better become aware of this audience and start trying to curry its favor by booking some of these musicians. A few years from now, [they] may wish [they] had started to develop a younger clientele when the time was right."<sup>29</sup>

### The Revolution Continues

Following the success of the October Revolution, Taylor urged Dixon to consider founding the musicians' collective they had long discussed. It was certainly an auspicious moment: with the Revolution, Dixon had gathered some of the brightest young players in the jazz underground and he had presented them as a large, polystylistic movement; critics and established musicians were taking notice; the music had shown itself capable of drawing sizeable audiences; the panel discussions had provided the kind of serious and formalized intellectual engagement that musicians in the black avant garde could not find elsewhere; and the Cellar Café could now be a base of

<sup>28</sup> Morgenstern, "The October Revolution," 32, 33.

<sup>29</sup> Williams, "The October Revolution," 33.



operations, removed from the foot traffic of Greenwich Village, but within walking distance for the students and intellectuals of Columbia University.<sup>30</sup>

Under the headline “The October Revolution Continues,” an October 15 advertisement in the *Village Voice* proclaimed: “Cecil Taylor, Archie Shepp, Sun-Ra [*sic*], Mike Mantler, Burton Green [*sic*], Roswell Rudd, John Tchicai, and Bill Dixon have united as the JAZZ COMPOSERS GUILD with the idea in mind that the music as represented by the above-named and others must and will no longer remain a part of the ‘underground’ scene.”<sup>31</sup> By this time, the membership of the Guild also included Alan Silva and Jon Winter (both members of the Free Form Improvisation Ensemble), as well as Paul and Carla Bley.<sup>32</sup> To qualify for membership, a musician had to lead his or her own group. For this reason, Rudd and Tchicai were both considered members, while their New York Art Quartet drummer, Graves, was still a sideperson. The pianist Lowell Davidson was an original member, but since he lived in Boston (he was then a graduate student in biochemistry at Harvard), he was unable to commute to meetings. He deputized his trumpet player, Mantler (who had relocated from Boston to New York in 1964), to take his place. Though Carla Bley did not lead her own group, she wrote the music for her husband Paul Bley (who had already been invited to join), and thus was offered membership. Carla Bley also recalls that Giuseppe Logan was asked to join, but he declined.<sup>33</sup> Dixon and Taylor visited Coleman in late 1964, when the latter was on hiatus from playing in public, and asked him to endorse the philosophy and activities of the collective. He refused, and in a 1965 interview, he seemed to indicate

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<sup>30</sup> Several scholarly sources mention Dixon and the Guild, often relating the same basic information. These include Val Wilmer, *As Serious as Your Life*, 213–15; Philippe Carles and Jean-Louis Comolli, *Free Jazz/Black Power* (Paris: Éditions Champ Libre, 1971), 50–51; Ekkehard Jost, *Sozialgeschichte des Jazz in den USA* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1982), 212–14; Iain Anderson, *This Is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 138–41; and Jason Robinson, *Improvising California: Community and Creative Music in Los Angeles and San Francisco* (Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 2005), 74–78. One Ph.D. dissertation includes an extended chapter on these events. See Christopher Bakriges, *African American Musical Avant-Gardism* (Ph.D. diss., York University, 2001), 167–93. Bakriges’s account is based largely on one interview by Dixon and documents from the mainstream press. Another useful study can be seen in a recent master’s thesis by Michael C. Heller, *So We Did It Ourselves: A Social and Musical History of Musician-Organized Jazz Festivals from 1960 to 1973* (M.A. thesis, Rutgers University-Newark, 2005). Will Menter’s dissertation, *The Making of Jazz and Improvised Music: Four Musicians’ Collectives in England and the USA*, provides an interesting sociological and racial account of the Guild, based on one interview each with Bill Dixon and Paul Bley (Ph.D. diss., University of Bristol, 1981). Jeff Schwartz’s *New Black Music: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Jazz, 1959–1965* (Ph.D. diss., Bowling Green State University, 2004) is an excellent source of historical data. The master’s thesis of Andrew Raffo Dewar, “*This Is an American Music*”: *Aesthetics, Music and Visual Art of Bill Dixon* (M.A. thesis, Wesleyan University, 2004), is unique in its depth of inquiry into Dixon’s aesthetics. The most complete and useful source on Dixon and his role as an organizer in the New York underground remains Young, *Dixonia*.

<sup>31</sup> Advertisement, *Village Voice*, October 15, 1964, 16.

<sup>32</sup> Jost writes that Albert Ayler joined the Guild “for a short time” upon his return from Europe, but this claim is not corroborated anywhere else in the literature, nor by Dixon himself; see Ekkehard Jost, *Free Jazz* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975; repr. 1994), 121. After the first three months of the Guild’s existence, Winter departed New York for the West Coast.

<sup>33</sup> Carla Bley, telephone interview by the author, September 29, 2006.

that he did not want organized advocacy to eclipse individual principle.<sup>34</sup> Dixon, Taylor, and Shepp also met with Coltrane during the Guild's existence to ask if he would consider joining an effort to withhold jazz music from New York City clubs for one weekend, but Coltrane, though sympathetic, did not offer his assistance.<sup>35</sup>

The process of choosing a name for the new group was a struggle. Each of its three words sparked considerable disagreement among members. For example, Silva recalls: "I had a major problem with the name.... I didn't like the word 'jazz'—I always felt it was a bad word, like 'ghetto'—and I didn't like the word 'composers' either.... I joined the Guild because I thought these musicians were some of the most important *improvisers*—not composers."<sup>36</sup> Greene alluded to the divergences of opinion in his comments to *Times* reporter John Wilson, who wrote, "The Guild's members have divergent views on as basic a subject as 'What is jazz?' ('We went through that for two meetings,' Greene admitted)."<sup>37</sup> "Guild" was the most contested component, perhaps owing to the fact that, according to Dixon's recollection, few of the other musicians knew what a guild was.<sup>38</sup> Dixon had researched medieval mercantile organizations, and he was struck by how they integrated the commercial and the aesthetic into a powerful social structure that regulated labor and distribution for an entire industry. "They were structured in such a way that it brought the art and the artisan closer together in dealing with business contracts with people," he reasoned. "For me, it [also] had a much more aesthetically pleasing sound. 'Union' is too flat, cold."<sup>39</sup> Despite his advocacy for the term, Dixon met considerable resistance from the other

<sup>34</sup> See Young, *Dixon*, 78, and Dan Morgenstern, "Ornette Coleman from the Heart," *Down Beat*, April 8, 1965, 16–18. In his biography of Coleman, John Litweiler states that the saxophonist declined an invitation to join the Guild, but this is not how Dixon remembers it. John Litweiler, *Ornette Coleman: The Harmolodic Life* (London: Quartet Books, 1992), 97. Wilmer reported: "Some, like Ornette Coleman, were invited to join but refused." See *As Serious as Your Life*, 214. Mantler also remarks that "We were trying to get Ornette to join, always. He didn't want to do it. That's the one specifically that I remember. Which was, in a way, too bad, because it was definitely not a united front. But he just wasn't ... didn't want to be involved." Michael Mantler, telephone interview by the author, October 29, 2006.

<sup>35</sup> Dixon, interview by the author, August 16, 2006. See also Young, *Dixon*, 78. Coltrane told the critic Frank Kofsky, "Yes, I *do* think that was a good idea ... , and I don't think it's dead. It was just something that couldn't be born at that time, but I still think it's a good idea." See Frank Kofsky, *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music* (New York: Pathfinder, 1970), 229. In addition to these composers, there were four non-musician affiliates of the Guild who attended meetings in the early days. The founder of ESP-Disk records, Bernard Stollman, who was the lawyer of Taylor and Coleman, was invited to observe in case the Guild needed legal counsel or help with organizing business papers. Dixon also invited two of his friends: Peter Sabino, the co-owner of the Cellar Café, and John Murray, a well-placed executive at WOR radio who was a friend and supporter of Dixon. Finally, there was a yet-identified white man with ties to Harry Belafonte, who was supposedly interested in supporting the Guild (nothing ever came of this connection).

<sup>36</sup> Dan Warburton, "Interviews with Alan Silva, November 8–22, 2002," *Paris Transatlantic*, <http://www.paris-transatlantic.com/magazine/interviews/silva.html> (accessed August 2, 2006). Silva's association of "jazz" with "ghetto" recalls one of Dixon's favorite sayings: "The word 'jazz,' like the word 'negro,' is an antiquated term. They went out of style at about the same time."

<sup>37</sup> Wilson, "Dig That Free-Form Jazz," X13. Dixon and Mantler also remember a few meetings devoted to the subject of the name alone (Dixon, interview by the author, August 16, 2006; Mantler, telephone interview by the author).

<sup>38</sup> Though none of my interviewees mentioned the Jazz Artists Guild, formed in 1960 (by Charles Mingus and Max Roach), they were probably aware of the organization. See Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>39</sup> Dixon, interview by the author, August 16, 2006.

musicians, who objected both to the European provenance of such organizations and to their implied commercialism.<sup>40</sup>

Dixon communicated the need for an organization like the Guild in a feature interview with Robert Levin in *Down Beat* in May 1965.<sup>41</sup> Although the piece ran at the precise moment of the Guild's dissolution, it remains the most complete public statement of the organization's philosophy and objectives. Jazz musicians, Dixon explained, are treated condescendingly, ignored, or outright exploited, resulting in an environment of collective anxiety and distrust to such an extent that the pursuit of collective empowerment has been lost to individual competition over the meager handouts of the jazz establishment. "Many musicians have been made so unstable that if they see their names in print a couple of times, they begin to believe, and try to convince you, that the Establishment isn't really that bad," Dixon told Levin.<sup>42</sup> Dixon also voiced the increasingly common complaint among jazz musicians that working conditions in the clubs were unfair and cruel. For instance, in Shepp's memorable and oft-quoted description, these establishments were "crude stables . . . where black men are groomed and paced like thoroughbreds to run till they bleed or else are hacked up outright for Lepage's glue."<sup>43</sup> Owners rarely offered avant-garde musicians anything beyond a Sunday afternoon or Monday night date, when few people would be in attendance and payment to the musicians was negligible.<sup>44</sup> Record companies, Dixon continued, force musicians to accept minimum scale wages and often asked bands to cover recording costs. Beyond such common practices, record executives also frequently controlled which compositions could be included on a record release. For example, Shepp's first recording date for Impulse! Records—a financial and artistic decision by Shepp that would play a prominent role in the dissolution of the Guild—was contingent upon his agreeing to perform only one of his own compositions. The album that resulted, *Four for Trane*, consists of four works by Coltrane and one tune by Shepp, "Rufus."

These working conditions had led to the "absence of representation of the most vital elements in the main stream of America's contemporary musical culture," so the time had come for musicians to do it for themselves, Dixon proclaimed. With this intention in mind, Dixon stated that the Guild's objectives were "to establish the music to its rightful place in the society; to awaken the musical conscience of the masses of people to that music which is essential to their lives; to protect the musicians and composers

<sup>40</sup> Presumably the musicians were unaware that guilds, or organizations that functioned just like them, had long existed outside of Europe.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Levin, "The Jazz Composers Guild: An Assertion of Dignity," *Down Beat*, May 6, 1965, 17–18. See also "Quelques Hommes En Colere," *Jazz Magazine*, July 1965, 16.

<sup>42</sup> Levin, "The Jazz Composers Guild," 18.

<sup>43</sup> Archie Shepp, "An Artist Speaks Bluntly," *Down Beat*, December 16, 1965, 11.

<sup>44</sup> See Kofsky, *Black Nationalism*, 145–153. At the end of his ballot for the 1964 *Down Beat* critics poll, Baraka wrote: "The stinking New York City club situation is causing very fine groups to break up. New York Contemporary Five, which was Shepp, Tchicai, Don Cherry, Don Moore, J.C. Moses, for instance." See *Down Beat*, August 13, 1964, 34. As Art D'Lugoff, owner of the Village Gate nightclub, explained in an essay in *Down Beat*, club owners simply could not afford to book unknown acts when even the larger names in jazz were no longer drawing the audiences they once did. According to D'Lugoff, proprietors were turning to comedians and folk and rock acts to fill their houses. Art D'Lugoff, "Experimentation in Public: The Clubowner's Viewpoint," *Down Beat*, April 8, 1965, 14–15. D'Lugoff was responding to Jones, "New York Loft and Coffee Shop Jazz."

from the existing forces of exploitation; to provide an opportunity for the audience to hear the music; [and] to provide facilities for the proper creation, rehearsal, performance, and dissemination of the music.”<sup>45</sup>

While the goals of the Guild could be summarized as exposure, protection, and support, the method they followed was one of disengagement. As Greene told Wilson, “Our idea is to corner the market, to take this music off the market for as long as is necessary to establish the kind of relations with the business people that are needed to give the music its proper outlets. Meanwhile, we’ll generate our own activities.”<sup>46</sup> The organization planned on building a core audience of committed listeners through weekly concerts before negotiating with club owners or major record labels. “I think I was alone in wanting to withdraw the music from the market,” Dixon recalls. “I was adamant about that. I wasn’t interested in going out and asking people to let us in the door. I said, ‘If there are 8 million people in New York, certainly we can get 1,000 to belong to us.’”<sup>47</sup> Mantler, however, is quick to point out that the act of pulling their musical labor off the market was less audacious than it sounds today. He remarks, “There was nothing to withdraw from, anyway. There was no market that this music was a part of. . . . There wasn’t anyone giving us gigs. That was the whole point. I think ‘withdrawing it from the market’ is a little grandiose.”<sup>48</sup>

The Guild’s rules of disengagement directed the members to refrain from recording, or from releasing any pre-existing recordings, unless the group voted that the project would be beneficial to all members of the Guild. The long-term goal was to negotiate a major deal with a large label that was favorable to all of its members.<sup>49</sup> In November 1964, as the Guild was slowly coming into shape, the New York Art Quartet (Rudd, Tchicai, Worrell, and Graves) recorded an album for Bernard Stollman, the young lawyer who had begun signing up-and-coming underground players to one- or two-record deals for his label, ESP-Disk. In accordance with Guild rules, Rudd remembers, they held the recording back from production until the late spring in 1965, when the Guild was in the process of dissolving.<sup>50</sup>

The other primary rule in the organization was that members could not accept a performing gig without having it approved by vote. Opportunities that were

<sup>45</sup> Levin, “The Jazz Composers Guild,” 18. This statement is a verbatim repetition of the organization’s charter and constitution. I am grateful to John Tchicai for sharing a photocopy of this document with me (this document is reproduced as Appendix 1).

<sup>46</sup> Wilson, “Dig That Free-Form Jazz,” X13.

<sup>47</sup> Dixon, interview by the author, August 16, 2006.

<sup>48</sup> Mantler, telephone interview by the author.

<sup>49</sup> There is some discrepancy in members’ memories. Rudd recalls a one-year moratorium on recording, while Dixon maintains that if the Guild approved of a given member’s project, it was permitted to go forward. In 1965, Archie Shepp explained: “The musicians who belonged were supposed to agree to play in a club only if the Guild accepted the conditions that were proposed; it was the same for a recording.” (“Les musiciens qui en faisaient partie ne devaient accepter de jouer dans un club que si la Guild acceptait les conditions qui étaient proposées; il en était de même pour un enregistrement.” Trans. by the author.) See Guy Kopelowicz, “Autumn in New York,” *Jazz Hot*, November 1965, 31, quoted in Carles and Comolli, *Free Jazz/Black Power*, 51.

<sup>50</sup> Rudd, interview by the author, New York City, October 5, 2006. Tchicai recalls that the ESP-Disk record was never discussed in a Guild meeting, thereby suggesting that in November 1964 the organization did not exert much control over its members. John Tchicai, interview by the author, New York City, February 8, 2007.

well-publicized, overly commercial, or part of the New York jazz “establishment” were rejected out of hand. Carla Bley recalls that when she and Mantler were close to securing the opportunity to write music for the Dave Garroway television talk show, they were ecstatic. The first host of NBC’s *Today* show, Garroway had continued (after leaving NBC in 1961) to host various talk programs. When Bley and Mantler brought the news to a Guild meeting for approval, not only was it rejected, but Bley recalls being shamed by the other members for even considering such an “establishment” gig (the opportunity never materialized anyway).<sup>51</sup> One-time gigs, on the other hand, had a better chance of being approved, especially if they were outside of New York City (the Guild aimed to be a strong presence within city limits). Rudd remembers presenting his case for a one-night playing date as a sideperson down South: “I brought it up. I said, ‘I need the money. Please think about that when you vote.’”<sup>52</sup> Though Rudd’s performance opportunity was not an event that was going to promote the Guild as a whole, it was not harmful enough to undermine the group’s integrity. In addition, the Guild’s work rules were in place to regulate the labor of its members as *leaders*, so when they performed as sidepersons, the rules were relaxed.

In the weeks after the Revolution, the Guild produced concerts by Sun Ra, the New York Art Quartet (still billed as the “Roswell Rudd-John Tchicai Quartet”), the Paul Bley quintet, the Alan Silva quartet, the Archie Shepp septet, and the Cecil Taylor Unit.<sup>53</sup> Nearly all of these concerts occurred at the Cellar Café (“rapidly becoming the New York center of avant-garde jazz activity,” reported *Down Beat*), where each leader rehearsed his ensemble during the week before their performance.<sup>54</sup> The group was also meeting regularly, about once per week, with the location rotating among members’ apartments. On October 30–31, the Guild held a nearly 24-hour marathon concert to raise general funds, and also to raise money for their upcoming four-day festival at Judson Hall.<sup>55</sup> This series of concerts, dubbed “Four Days in December,” occurred December 28–31, and featured groups led by each member of the Guild.<sup>56</sup> Just as notable were the musicians appearing on the concerts as sidemen, a veritable who’s who of young avant-garde

<sup>51</sup> Bley, telephone interview by the author.

<sup>52</sup> Rudd, interview by the author, October 5, 2006.

<sup>53</sup> Young, *Dixonia*, 350–352. See also an advertisement in the *Columbia Daily Spectator*, October 23, 1964, 4.

<sup>54</sup> “Strictly Ad Lib,” *Down Beat*, December 17, 1964, 42. Advertisement, *Village Voice*, November 5, 1964, 12. One concert took place at composer Philip Corner’s loft at 2 Pitt Street on the Lower East Side. See advertisement in the *Village Voice*, November 19, 1964, 19.

<sup>55</sup> See advertisement, *Village Voice*, October 29, 1964, 16: “To Raise Funds to Provide a Permanent Home for the Guild.”

<sup>56</sup> Greene remembers that Shepp came up with the title, presumably a reference to the film about the Kennedy assassination, *Four Days in November* (United Artists, 1964), which had been released a few months prior. Greene, telephone interview by the author. The concerts cost \$2.50 at the door, with advance tickets of \$2.00. See “Four Days in December” concert flyer, Bill Dixon clipping file, Institute of Jazz Studies, John Cotton Dana Library, Rutgers University-Newark, Newark, NJ; see also “Jazz Composers Schedule ‘4 Days in December’ Fete,” *New York Times*, December 26, 1964, 7; “Music Notes,” *New York Times*, December 29, 1964, 22; “Avant Garde Organizes, to Present Concert Series,” *Down Beat*, December 31, 1964, 10; John S. Wilson, “Avant-Garde Jazz Series Offers Cecil Taylor and Dixon Quintet,” *New York Times*, December 29, 1964, 20; Don Heckman, “Caught in the Act: The Jazz Composers Guild,” *Down Beat*, February 11, 1965, 37–38; advertisement, *Village Voice*, November 12, 1964, 16; advertisement, *Village Voice*, November 19, 1964, 19; “Jazz Concerts,” *Village Voice*, December 24, 1964, 14 and 15; advertisement, *Village Voice*, December 17, 1964, 22; and Spellman, “Jazz at the Judson.”

jazz players in New York: saxophonists Jimmy Lyons, Robin Kenyatta, Marshall Allen, Marion Brown, Pharoah Sanders, Pat Patrick, and Lacy; bassists Buell Neidlinger, Eddie Gomez, Ronnie Boykins, and Reggie Johnson; and drummers Andrew Cyrille, Rashied Ali, and Graves. The concert was also the first appearance of the Jazz Composers Guild Orchestra, an eleven-piece big band performing the compositions of Carla Bley and Mantler. This group outlived the Guild by many years as the Jazz Composers Orchestra, and was led by Bley and Mantler sporadically into the 1970s.

Wilson reported that the first night's concert of ensembles led by Taylor and Dixon attracted a standing-room-only crowd of over 300, and that the remaining three concerts drew about half as many audience members.<sup>57</sup> By contrast, Spellman described "capacity or near-capacity audiences which were vocally sympathetic to the great bulk of the music played."<sup>58</sup> The December 31 issue of *Down Beat*, which presumably reached newsstands the week before the concerts, announced: "According to a Guild spokesman, the festival will be recorded for the organization's own label, and an initial two-LP release will include a track by each of the groups performing at the concerts, with the subsequent releases devoted to the individual group; the records will be available through subscription and at selected stores specializing in jazz."<sup>59</sup>

Like the October Revolution, "Four Days in December" was a major success and represented one of the signal achievements of the Guild. Judson Hall was a sizeable, well-known venue, and members of the Guild cooperated to produce these four concerts without help from managers, agents, or publicists. While the double-LP of Guild performances never materialized, this plan to record and self-release excerpts of the series was a virtually unprecedented and exciting possibility in the first weeks of 1965. By capitalizing on advance stories about the event in *Down Beat* and the *New York Times*, the Guild was able to attract audience members from across the country. Rudd remembers being approached after his performance by several individuals interested in starting similar collectives in other cities.<sup>60</sup> Word of the festival also drew critics from *Down Beat* and the *New York Times*, as well as *The Nation*, where Spellman presented the first published account of the Guild's history and values, and also painted a favorable portrait of the four nights of music. This attention led not only to reviews in each of those publications, but longer feature articles in *Down Beat* and the *Times*, as well as a review of a Guild performance some weeks later in *The New Yorker*.<sup>61</sup>

Following the October Revolution, the owner of the building that housed the Cellar Café, perhaps sensing that he had a hit on his hands, raised the rent on the basement space from \$400 to \$1,000. Faced with this staggering increase, the Guild sought out a new home.<sup>62</sup> After the "Four Days in December" concerts, they settled on the dance

<sup>57</sup> Wilson, "Dig That Free-Form Jazz," X13.

<sup>58</sup> Spellman, "Jazz at the Judson," 150.

<sup>59</sup> "Avant Garde Organizes, to Present Concert Series," *Down Beat*, December 31, 1964, 10.

<sup>60</sup> Rudd, interview by the author, October 5, 2006. See also Rudd's comments in Levin, "The Jazz Composers Guild," 19.

<sup>61</sup> Levin, "The Jazz Composers Guild" and Wilson, "Dig That Free-Form Jazz." The *New Yorker* review ran in February and praised a performance by the New York Art Quartet. See Whitney Balliett, "Comes the Revolution," *New Yorker*, February 27, 1965, 121–124.

<sup>62</sup> Dixon, interview by the author, August 16, 2006.

studio of choreographer Edith Stephen, whose triangular space at Seventh Avenue and 11th Street was called the Contemporary Center.<sup>63</sup> As it happens, the site was two floors above the Village Vanguard, a center of major-name jazz in Greenwich Village that, during the Guild's existence, hosted groups led by Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln, Thelonious Monk, Charles Mingus, and Coleman. It is unclear how and why this location was chosen, but Dixon was against it from the start: "My feeling was that this put the Guild and its presentations in a form of 'competition' for audiences that wouldn't be to our advantage."<sup>64</sup>

Despite these concerns, the Guild remained at the Contemporary Center for the rest of its brief life. At this site, the organization produced 33 concerts—every Friday and Saturday, and by the end of January, every Sunday as well—by its members. These events included performances by Shepp's quintet and sextet, the New York Art Quartet, the Free Form Improvisation Ensemble, Paul Bley's quintet, Sun Ra's Solar Orchestra, the Mike Mantler-Carla Bley Quintet, the Jazz Composers Guild Orchestra, the Cecil Taylor Unit, and groups led by Greene and Silva (both of whom were moving on after the break-up of the Free Form Improvisation Ensemble).<sup>65</sup>

During these months, the group also researched other projects. According to Levin, Rudd—who had been voted treasurer at a meeting that he was unable to attend—was in correspondence with other organizations in Detroit, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C. Levin also told of a "campaign to get colleges and universities interested in scheduling concerts by the [Guild] members."<sup>66</sup> In an interview in 2002, Alan Silva said that he was in charge of "records and music education" in the Guild. Val Wilmer also reported that he "headed a committee researching the record business for the Jazz Composers Guild," but nothing seems to have come out of these duties.<sup>67</sup> On another occasion, Dixon and Taylor looked at a five-story building on East 65th Street that was on the market for \$65,000. Dixon wanted to turn the building into a recording studio, a rehearsal space, and a place for visiting musicians to stay. To secure money for the down payment, he arranged a meeting with representatives from a few of the major record labels, offering them the opportunity to record all the members of the Guild for a package price (somewhere around \$100,000), a deal the labels refused.<sup>68</sup>

During its lifetime, the organization also developed a charter document outlining the work rules they had agreed upon, but Rudd recalls that the document itself was not

<sup>63</sup> See advertisement in the *Village Voice*, December 31, 1964, 6: "The Jazz Revolution Continues. The New Headquarters of the Jazz Composers Guild Is the Triangle Above the Village Vanguard."

<sup>64</sup> Dixon, email communication with the author, October 13, 2006. Stephen recalls, however, that it was Bill Dixon who had originally contacted her about leasing the space on weekends. Edith Stephen, telephone conversation with the author, December 28, 2006.

<sup>65</sup> See Young, *Dixonia*, 356–367. The concerts were all advertised in the *Village Voice*, and appeared in the concert listings of the *New York Times*. Jon Winter returned to California sometime after the FFIE's final performance on February 5, 1965, and Friedman, a more conventional composer who was attracted to the notion of unlimited freedom that completely improvised, collective music-making represented, lost interest in the group when they began working with pre-composed material, including his own. Friedman, interview by the author, October 5, 2006.

<sup>66</sup> Levin, "The Jazz Composers Guild," 18.

<sup>67</sup> Warburton, "Interviews with Alan Silva" Wilmer, *As Serious as Your Life*, 239.

<sup>68</sup> Dixon, interview by the author, August 15, 2006.

finished and distributed until the spring of 1965, when the Guild was on the verge of folding.<sup>69</sup> The charter was the direct result of the chaotic and often heated meetings that the group held. “The constitution was born out of certain needs. It was not a thing that was imposed so much, as it kind of arose out of the need for order, or direction, consensus,” said Rudd.<sup>70</sup> The document had the opposite effect on other participants, who chafed at the idea of having to “conform” to such a formal constitution. Rudd recalls that by mid-April, meetings consisted of him, Dixon, and two or three other people. At about this time, the organization ceased to exist.

## Dis Here

In many ways, the Jazz Composers Guild began with disagreement, continued with dissension, and ended in dispute, anger, and disappointment. Rudd describes the meetings as “verbal jam sessions,” with different members soloing on long digressions and personal histories, augmented with frequent altercations: “We all got dissed. We were all dissing each other, in one way or another. It was unavoidable.”<sup>71</sup> Indeed, Graves describes the one meeting he attended with a single word, “chaos.”<sup>72</sup> These internal disputes were obliquely referenced in contemporary press coverage. In an interview with Nat Hentoff, Taylor remarked, “It’s hard to get a group of people to trust each other, work together and communicate at the deepest level,” while Dixon told Levin, “To say that the personalities of any group sometimes come into severe conflict with each other even when the participants are in pursuit of the same idealistic goal is a vast understatement.”<sup>73</sup> In his review of the Judson Hall festival, Spellman referred to “disciplinary problems the J.C.G. may not be able to overcome.”<sup>74</sup> As frustrating and draining as these arguments were, many of the members of Guild recall them being productive and cathartic, perhaps the inevitable outcome in any such collection of unique individuals.<sup>75</sup> Aside from the obvious, and sadly unsurprising, gender imbalance in the group, the heterogeneity of member backgrounds could hardly have been more extreme. There were African Americans from the South (Shepp, Ra), New England (Dixon was born in Nantucket), New York City (Taylor), Bermuda (Silva), and Saturn (Ra). John Tchicai was African Danish. Michael Mantler was Austrian. The European Americans hailed from Canada (Paul Bley), the West Coast (Carla Bley, Jon Winter), the Ivy League (Rudd attended Yale), and Chicago (Greene, whose Russian Jewish grandparents had been labor organizers in New York’s garment district). Most of the members were heterosexual, but there were some who manifested

<sup>69</sup> Rudd, interview by the author, October 5, 2006. Most of Dixon’s papers from this period—correspondence, Guild business papers, and his own carefully kept meeting minutes—were lost when he fell behind on payments on a storage space in the 1970s.

<sup>70</sup> Rudd, interview by the author, October 5, 2006.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Graves, interview by the author.

<sup>73</sup> Taylor quoted in Nat Hentoff, “The Persistent Challenge of Cecil Taylor,” *Down Beat*, February 25, 1965, 40; Dixon quoted in Levin, “The Jazz Composers Guild,” 17.

<sup>74</sup> Spellman, “Jazz at the Judson,” 151.

<sup>75</sup> Greene, Bley, and Rudd, interviews with the author.



non-normative sexual identities (Ra and Taylor).<sup>76</sup> With the possible exception of Carla Bley (who told me that she was still young and impressionable at the time), the Guild was an exceedingly brief articulation of fully formed individual histories. Rudd points out, “We were not teenagers, you know? We were in our twenties, thirties.... Sun Ra was probably in his forties. Quite a range of age and experience, but all very hard-earned.”<sup>77</sup>

Building trust was key to the Guild’s survival, and a number of factors combined to undercut this process before the collective was even properly constituted. The personal relationship between Dixon and Shepp had soured by October of 1964, when the two were not even on speaking terms. Though they had co-led the Archie Shepp–Bill Dixon quartet from late 1961 to the end of 1963, Shepp began working with Don Cherry on trumpet in the New York Contemporary Five (initially because Dixon had developed problems with his embouchure).<sup>78</sup> Tensions between the two continued during the existence of the Guild, when Shepp began to attract more press attention. Two Baraka-penned interview features on Shepp ran in *Down Beat* and *Jazz* during the height of the Guild’s activities, but this coverage included no mention of the organization or its other members, an omission no doubt also attributable to the tension between Dixon and Baraka (which I discuss in greater detail below).<sup>79</sup> Dixon also interpreted Shepp’s involvement with black nationalism as careerist, commenting in a public forum, “Certain people wouldn’t be quite that willing to identify themselves with certain things if it wasn’t timely.”<sup>80</sup>

Sun Ra also clashed with several of his colleagues, and most notably Carla Bley. In fact, her invitation to join the Guild was extended only after some debate among the other members. Dixon recalls: “I had to really be very, very severe with the Guild. They didn’t want Carla in the group, because of Sun Ra. Sun Ra was against it.... Carla at the time wrote all of the music for Paul Bley, so she was one half of Paul, so she deserved it. He wrote no music at the time, he just played, so that was Carla’s thing.”<sup>81</sup> Her presence apparently did little to alter the belligerent and famously antagonistic mood of Guild meetings, which in her memory were full of shouting and challenges to “put it on the table!”<sup>82</sup> Well known as a misogynist who forbade women from entering the Arkestra’s communal living and rehearsal spaces, Sun Ra was particularly hostile

<sup>76</sup> See John Gill, “Miles in the Sky,” in *Queer Noises: Male and Female Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 58–67.

<sup>77</sup> Rudd, interview by the author, October 5, 2006. Spellman, presumably reporting on a conversation he had with Cecil Taylor, wrote: “The Guild was comprised of several highly developed sensitivities, and meetings soon turned into fights, as there were very real conflicts of interest and of personality.” See Spellman, *Black Music, Four Lives* (New York: Schocken Paperbacks, 1966; repr. 1970), 26.

<sup>78</sup> Young, *Dixonia*, 29–66.

<sup>79</sup> LeRoi Jones, “Voice from the Avant-Garde: Archie Shepp,” *Down Beat*, January 14, 1965, 18–19, 36; LeRoi Jones, “Archie Shepp Live,” *Jazz*, January 1965, 8–9. There is also no mention of the Guild in Philippe Carles, “Archie Shepp: Archie Méconnu,” *Jazz Magazine*, June 1965, 50–55, though there is a discussion of the earlier Archie Shepp–Bill Dixon Quartet.

<sup>80</sup> “Jazz and Revolutionary Black Nationalism,” *Jazz*, May 1967, 38.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Carla Bley, telephone interview by the author.

toward Carla Bley.<sup>83</sup> When things began turning sour in the Guild, he recounted the old seamen's legend that says taking a woman on a voyage will sink the ship.<sup>84</sup> Though painfully shy at the time, Bley did not take this abuse quietly, and she remembers the shouting match that ensued and her angry departure from the meeting. As Stollman told me in 2006, "She was an iron lady then, as she is now."<sup>85</sup>

Sun Ra was also critical of the political stance of Taylor and Shepp, who "were not talking about Space or Intergalactic things.... They were talking about Avant Garde and the New Thing."<sup>86</sup> Tchicai also recalls these disagreements, adding that Taylor and Sun Ra further argued over who had influenced whom.<sup>87</sup> John Szwed reports that Sun Ra lost interest in the Guild because he felt that his group was doing all the promotion, and that some other members were not sincere in their aims. "He also disagreed with the organizing principle of the group," Szwed writes. According to Szwed, "for them to be successful, [Ra] thought, someone should be serving as the leader."<sup>88</sup>

Trust was further undermined when Guild members violated the group's rules to take gigs on the side.<sup>89</sup> Beyond just Sunday afternoon or Monday night gigs at the bigger clubs, these engagements consisted of more significant opportunities provided by the major spokesmen of the young jazz underground, who were all in some ways building or defending their influence on the same rapidly expanding field of musical production. There were three poles of organization and support—the Guild, Baraka, and Stollman—and each attempted to frame the emergent discourse of black experimentalism along different lines. The Guild was concerned with presenting music outside of the entertainment economy and without necessary expectation of traditional jazz signifiers. Baraka and the budding Black Arts movement attempted to forge a black populist understanding of free jazz, which was increasingly linked first to black power, and then to a pan-African cultural nationalism. Through his concert productions and record label, Stollman most resembled the traditional impresario, albeit one devoted to underground and largely unknown artists.

<sup>83</sup> Ra did eventually invite the vocalist and dancer June Tyson into the band, but he still banished her from the recording studio if a session was not going well. See John F. Szwed, *Space Is the Place: The Lives and Times of Sun Ra* (New York: Da Capo, 1998), 250.

<sup>84</sup> Wilmer, *As Serious as Your Life*, 215.

<sup>85</sup> Bernard Stollman, interview by the author, New York City, December 5, 2006.

<sup>86</sup> Tam Fiofori, "Sun Ra's Space Odyssey," *Down Beat*, May 14, 1970, 16. This quote is discussed by Jost in *Free Jazz*, 181, and by Ajay Heble in *Landing on the Wrong Note: Jazz Dissonance and Critical Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 133.

<sup>87</sup> John Tchicai, interview by the author. See also Mike Troughon, "John Tchicai," an interview on Tchicai's website, [www.dcn.davis.ca.us/~jomnamo/rub\\_tchicai/page\\_inter.html](http://www.dcn.davis.ca.us/~jomnamo/rub_tchicai/page_inter.html) (accessed August 3, 2006).

<sup>88</sup> Szwed, *Space Is the Place*, 206–207. He told *Jazz Magazine* in 1965: "I joined because they played a different music, because they sought new paths.... But I found that they were not very sincere in certain things that they said. So I left them." ("J'y suis entré parce qu'ils jouaient une musique différente, parce qu'ils cherchaient des voies nouvelles.... Mais j'ai trouvé qu'ils n'étaient pas très sincères dans certaines choses qu'ils disaient. Alors je les ai quittés." Trans. by the author.) See "Visite au Dieu Soleil," *Jazz Magazine*, December 1965, 74. In fact, Sun Ra did not split from the Guild as early as he claims—the Arkestra's final concert at the Contemporary Center was only one month prior to the dissolution of the organization.

<sup>89</sup> I have been unable to document specific instances of scabbing, but Dixon, Greene, and Rudd all remember it happening. Taylor "also points to a lot of scabbing on the part of its musicians, both white and black, as another main cause for its disintegration." See Spellman, *Black Music: Four Lives*, 27.

Baraka was the music's most prominent voice in the mainstream jazz press, and his celebrity was skyrocketing after the publication of *Blues People* (1963) and the 1964 premiere of *Dutchman* (1963). Baraka's work with the New York Art Quartet in November 1964 produced the recording of his poem "Black Dada Nihilismus" over Rudd's composition *Sweet*. A few weeks later, *Down Beat* reported that Baraka was holding "informal sessions" in his East Village apartment, and that Shepp's group had performed on December 5 and 6 (Shepp lived in the same building at the time).<sup>90</sup> As the poet and writer Hettie Jones, who was Baraka's first wife, wrote in her memoir, "Increasingly the racial balance in our house shifted, as a black avant-garde—writers, musicians, painters, dancers—became part of the new East Village."<sup>91</sup> The circle around Baraka at this time included fellow writer Spellman, saxophonists Shepp, Marzette Watts, and Marion Brown, drummer Sunny Murray, and painters William White and Bob Thompson. Referring to the mecca of modern jazz in the East Village, Baraka wrote in his 1984 autobiography, "The Five Spot was the center for us."<sup>92</sup>

Watts, whose 1969 Savoy album *Marzette Watts Ensemble* was produced by Dixon, told Larry Nai in 1998 that Baraka's short-lived, proto-nationalist political action group, the Organization of Young Men (OYM), had made a conscious decision to promote Ayler as the next "big name" in the music. "Baraka got involved in a move to basically take all of the music off the market, and we would just push one guy; and everybody agreed it should be Albert," Watts recalled. As he tells it, "When things began to move, Albert jumped up and went to Denmark.... Archie just moved right in that spot."<sup>93</sup> Described by Baraka as "one fledgling effort at building some political consciousness downtown," OYM included Spellman, Shepp, writer Steve Cannon, photographer Leroy McClucas, musician Walter Bowe, critic Harold Cruse, writer and activist Calvin Hicks, poet Bobb Hamilton, and others.<sup>94</sup>

After Baraka's move uptown to found the Black Arts Repertory Theater and School in March 1965, his musical associates also included Sun Ra, Ayler, Graves, and Hugh Glover.<sup>95</sup> During that month, Baraka held a few benefits for his new cultural organization. At the Polish National Hall on March 1, groups led by Giuseppe Logan, Pharaoh

<sup>90</sup> "Strictly Ad Lib," *Down Beat*, January 14, 1965, 11. The advertisement that ran in the *Village Voice* specified December 4 and 5. See *Village Voice*, December 3, 1964, 20.

<sup>91</sup> Hettie Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1990), 172.

<sup>92</sup> Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1984), 258. On Baraka's salon, see pp. 256–260.

<sup>93</sup> Larry Nai, "Marzette Watts Interview," *Cadence*, August 1998, 14; see also Young, *Dixonia*, 37. The chronology here is complicated. The OYM existed between 1961 and 1962. When it dissolved, most of its politically-involved members—including Baraka and Shepp—joined On Guard, Calvin Hicks's black intellectual organization. On the latter group, see Tom Dent, "Umbra Days," *Black American Literature Forum* 14 (1980): 105–108. In light of the nearly four-year interval between meetings of OYM and Baraka's first feature articles on Shepp, I am presuming that Watts is referring to a decision to promote Shepp that actually came about some years after the dissolution of OYM, but that nonetheless involved many of the same individuals.

<sup>94</sup> Baraka, *Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 248.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 298–299. Graves also went on to write articles in Baraka's cultural nationalist magazine, *Cricket* (see Graves, untitled article, *Cricket* 1 [1968]: 14–17), and also conducted a "Black Aesthetic and Black Artist Workshop" at the Third International Conference on Black Power in Philadelphia, August 29 to September 1, 1968.

Sanders, and Dionne Warwick performed.<sup>96</sup> On March 28, a benefit concert at the Village Gate featured Ayler, Shepp, Sun Ra, Coltrane, Grachan Moncur, vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson, and trumpeter Charles Tolliver.<sup>97</sup> A few months earlier, Baraka had been involved in an art opening at Galaxy Art Center that featured the paintings of Thompson, White, and Michael and Joyce Snow; the poetry of Baraka, Ralph Lewis, and others; and the music of the New York Art Quartet. Advertised under the name of the Jazz Composers Guild, the event ran opposite the Guild's regular Friday night performance at the Contemporary Center, and as Young observes, "offers some of the earliest evidence of a splintering of the Guild's constituents as the organization lost cohesion."<sup>98</sup>

This competition over leadership of the jazz avant garde was exacerbated by the personal animosity between Dixon and Baraka. Baraka's feelings about Dixon and his music were expressed in his jazz criticism. For example, in a review of Dixon's and Shepp's second Savoy album, which featured one composer per side, Baraka wrote, "The Shepp side contains the serious business."<sup>99</sup> Another likely slight can be found in Baraka's "Introducing Bobby Bradford," a 1962 essay in which the author does not acknowledge Dixon in his description of a "new wave" of prominent young trumpeters. According to Baraka, this "new wave" included Bradford, Don Cherry, Freddie Hubbard, Richard Williams, Lee Morgan, Ted Curson, Don Ellis, and Marcus Belgrave.<sup>100</sup> Nearly a year earlier, Dixon had written a long letter to *Down Beat* in which he criticized Baraka's inaccuracies in reporting. He specifically cited the critic's failure to identify Dixon as the principal composer and arranger for the New York Contemporary Five, which Baraka described as having a "pretty wild book" of compositions by Shepp, Tchicai, and Cherry. Dixon also attacked Baraka for his "turgid self-conscious 'in-group' superiority generally and rightly associated with pseudo-intellectuals."<sup>101</sup>

Spellman was another member of the Baraka circle who had little respect for Dixon's work. In his review of the "Four Days in December," he commented bluntly that "Dixon is a far better organizer than musician."<sup>102</sup> One year earlier, Spellman wrote:

As a space age trumpet player [Dixon is] in trouble.... [T]here can only be so many Miles Davises, since there's only one style of trumpet playing to adopt if you play badly.... Trouble is that Dixon plays with a borrowed melodic ear. You can hear

<sup>96</sup> "Strictly Ad Lib," *Down Beat*, April 8, 1965, 39.

<sup>97</sup> See Jason Robinson, "The Challenge of the Changing Same: The Jazz Avant-Garde of the 1960s, the Black Aesthetic, and the Black Arts Movement," *Critical Studies in Improvisation* 1, no. 2 (2005), 20.

<sup>98</sup> Young, *Dixonia*, 358. Carla Bley recalls that Dixon was angry at Rudd and Tchicai for taking this gig. Bley, telephone interview by the author. In a brief announcement of this event, *Down Beat* erroneously reported that "the Jazz Composers Guild is booking the music at a new spot, the Galaxy Art Center." See "Strictly Ad Lib," *Down Beat*, March 11, 1965, 12.

<sup>99</sup> LeRoi Jones, "Apple Cores," *Down Beat*, December 17, 1964, 40.

<sup>100</sup> See "Introducing Bobby Bradford," in Jones, *Black Music*, 99–103.

<sup>101</sup> Bill Dixon, "Dixon Digs at Jones," *Down Beat*, January 2, 1964, 8–9. Dixon's disagreement with Baraka showed up two years later in the question-and-answer period of a panel discussion on "Jazz and Revolutionary Black Nationalism" sponsored by Jazz. "There were certain points that were sort of touched upon which I think affect all of the players much more so than some of the other aspects of being nationalists and that type of thing," he said. See "Jazz and Revolutionary Black Nationalism," *Jazz*, May 1967, 38.

<sup>102</sup> See Spellman, "Jazz at the Judson," 150.

everybody who's hip in his playing. His tone is fuzzy and indefinite, varies from track to track. He does not arrive at his style by choice. He rather adapts a melodic line to his own technical limitations.<sup>103</sup>

After graduating from Columbia University Law School, Stollman was involved in artists' rights, music publishing, and copyright law, and at one point he served as attorney and manager for Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor.<sup>104</sup> Initially called upon to counsel the Guild on obtaining foundation money and perhaps incorporating as a non-profit, his tenure as a legal advisor to the Guild was brief, and the accounts of Stollman and Dixon vary considerably as to how this relationship ended. Dixon recalls that the young lawyer fronted the group some money to pay rent on the East Village loft of vibraphonist Ollie Shearer, where the Guild was producing their marathon fundraising concert on the night of October 30.<sup>105</sup> When Stollman demanded that he be permitted to stand at the door and collect his money from attendees, Guild members—primarily Dixon—refused, and returned the loan. After scrambling to borrow the money from another source, and after preparing for the concert itself, Dixon claims that the organization voted to expel him. He was gone by the end of November.<sup>106</sup> By contrast, Stollman remembers being invited to attend one meeting in the first weeks of the Guild's existence. He recalls that he was angrily confronted by members of the organization: "They were telling me off. 'We're not going to allow this.' It was like a union meeting—the union steward talking to the employer. 'We're going to have this, we're going to have that, you're not going to be able to do this and do that.' It was that kind of exchange."<sup>107</sup> This memory is consistent with the description Stollman offered in 1966: "[Dixon] regarded me as a spokesman for the so-called 'jazz business structure' for he spoke to me with great hostility."<sup>108</sup> Perhaps rightly, members of the Guild—particularly Dixon and Carla Bley—viewed Stollman's record company as a danger to the group's cohesion. Though Stollman had not yet released any recordings of the new music, he had begun to establish a reputation as someone to contend with, appearing as he did at the October Revolution and offering to record most of the artists on the festival. Indeed, he had already recorded the Paul Bley Quintet on October 20, 1964, and the New York Art Quartet would soon follow.<sup>109</sup> In his recollection, this led some Guild members to accuse him of meddling

<sup>103</sup> A. B. Spellman, review of *Archie Shepp/Bill Dixon Quartet*, by Archie Shepp and Bill Dixon, *KULCHUR* 3, no. 11 (Autumn 1963), 95.

<sup>104</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the following section is based on both Clifford Allen, "Bernard Stollman: The ESP-Disk Story," *All About Jazz*, November 21, 2005, <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=19661> (accessed October 17, 2006), and Stollman, interview by the author.

<sup>105</sup> Young, *Dixonia*, 352.

<sup>106</sup> Dixon, interview by the author, August 16, 2006.

<sup>107</sup> Stollman, interview by the author.

<sup>108</sup> Ralph Berton, "Conversations with Bernard Stollman," *Sounds and Fury*, April 1966, 38.

<sup>109</sup> See Paul Bley Quintet, *Barrage ESPCD 1008*, 2001 (orig. 1965), compact disc. Stollman remembers that "it was this whole community of improvisational musicians and composers. I invited them all to record—I'd already started something with Albert, and I invited all these guys to record for my new label. Everybody accepted." See Allen, "Bernard Stollman: The ESP-Disk Story." See also "Strictly Ad Lib," *Down Beat*, November 19, 1964, 41: "A new label, ESP, dedicated to avant-garde jazz, has recorded tenor saxophonist Albert Ayler, with bass and drums, and the Roswell Rudd Quartet, which consists of the trombonist, altoist John Tchicai, bassist Louis Worrell, and drummer Milford Graves."

in their business: “I left their meeting, and it was pretty clear to me—Carla couldn’t have made it more plain—that I was the enemy.” For his part, Stollman was not sympathetic to the aims of the Guild. “If the Guild has its way . . . , they would set very rigorous conditions under which an artist could work with me. And I wasn’t about to be dictated to,” he remarks. “It was a decision between an individual artist and me.... And everyone has to be free to make their own decisions, I think. I wasn’t going to deal with a union, or Guild, or anything of that sort.”<sup>110</sup>

Regardless of what actually transpired between Stollman and the Guild, this antipathy may have contributed to Stollman’s decision to begin booking an after-hours concert series, “Jazz in Repertory,” at Café Au-Go-Go. The series began on December 8 and featured Guild members Taylor, Sun Ra, and the New York Art Quartet, in addition to Giuseppe Logan and Bud Powell, who had recently returned from France.<sup>111</sup> In 1966, Stollman told journalist Ralph Berton:

The Jazz Composers Guild had ostracized Giuseppe Logan [and saxophonist] Byron Allen . . . for refusing to join the Guild and for being willing to record for ESP. When the Guild started its concerts I was concerned, and so were Logan and Allen, lest the critics and public hear only Guild members—so I produced a few midnight concerts with them at the Go Go.... Sun Ra had agreed to play, too.<sup>112</sup>

Young adds that “though technically not ‘bar’ performances [the Café did not serve alcohol], the entire booking constituted second-rate treatment (at the hands of a third-party promoter) and was therefore frowned upon as a breach of the Guild’s principles.”<sup>113</sup>

Stollman continued to organize events in the coming months. A notice in the February 25, 1965, issue of *Down Beat* announced that he had “formed the American Society for Serious Improvised Music,” an organization that made its debut at Judson Hall on February 1. The concert featured Logan and Graves as leaders (the latter led a percussion ensemble).<sup>114</sup> Stollman’s coterie of Ayler, Logan, Allen, and Powell appeared again on May 1 at Town Hall in a concert presented by “producer Norman Seaman and ESP records.”<sup>115</sup> By November of that year, ESP-Disk had released records by Ayler, Logan, Allen, the New York Art Quartet, and Paul Bley.<sup>116</sup> Despite claims that

<sup>110</sup> Stollman, interview by the author.

<sup>111</sup> “Strictly Ad Lib,” *Down Beat*, January 14, 11. Stollman was friend and advisor to Powell’s family. See “Bud Powell, Lost and Found Twice, Returns to Paris,” *Down Beat*, December 3, 1964, 8: “According to a friend, attorney Bernard Stollman, the pianist appeared in good spirits, playing the piano and ‘talking more volubly than usual.’”

<sup>112</sup> Berton, “Conversations with Bernard Stollman,” 38.

<sup>113</sup> Young, *Dixonia*, 353.

<sup>114</sup> “Strictly Ad Lib,” *Down Beat*, February 25, 1965, 14. The announcement erroneously reported that alto saxophonist Byron Allen performed. Stollman recalls little about the “American Society for Serious Improvised Music,” but notes that it was probably a one-off promotional stunt that he thought up for the concert. The name of the fictitious group reflects a common antipathy to the word “jazz,” which many African American musicians (extending back to Duke Ellington) had avoided, and Stollman shared this sentiment. Indeed, almost none of the dozens of ESP-Disk releases mentions the word. Stollman, interview by the author. The program included a Logan work performed by a string quartet, plus pianist Don Pullen, bassist Eddie Gomez, and drummer Marvin Petillo as sidepersons.

<sup>115</sup> “Strictly Ad Lib,” *Down Beat*, May 20, 1965, 11. The concert was reviewed by Dan Morgenstern in *Down Beat*, July 15, 1965, 12.

<sup>116</sup> John S. Wilson, “Who’s Carrying the Jazz Banner Now?,” *New York Times*, November 28, 1965. See also Wilmer, *As Serious as Your Life*, 231–33.

he “didn’t have the money and wasn’t affluent,” Stollman appears to have had considerable resources to launch this venture after requesting the funds from his mother: “She gave me \$105,000 which in those days was a fortune—now, you multiply that by ten. So in eighteen months, I produced 45 records. I wasn’t what you’d describe as an aficionado of the music; it was something I could do that was meaningful.”<sup>117</sup>

In an early 1966 column in *Down Beat*, Baraka wrote somewhat sardonically of his rival: “All the ESPs I’ve heard are worth having. I hope the musicians are benefiting as much from the recordings as the producer and the consumers. (A likely story.)”<sup>118</sup> Critic and journalist Robert Levin, who was certainly in the Guild camp, likewise excoriated Stollman at the time as “a very typical current demonstration of the exploitation of the Negro jazz musicians by the white business man.”<sup>119</sup>

The allegiances of Jazz Composers Guild members were tested in this multi-polar scene, and the subtle mood of mutual distrust never really dissipated. Moreover, while the organization was slowly scraping together the funds to launch a record label or to buy a building, their money was going to pay rent at the Cellar Café and at Edith Stephen’s dance studio. In this regard, their attempted reorientation of the musical field had its limits, as itinerant and poverty-stricken jazz musicians still had no wealthy patrons or rent-free performance spaces like the Judson Church, home to so many white experimental artists during these years. Stollman began making offers to record everyone at the October Revolution, and within weeks, several Guild musicians had entered the studio to record for him. Greene and Sun Ra followed in 1965 after the break-up of the collective.<sup>120</sup> On the other side, Baraka was the closest thing this scene had to a Jill Johnston or a Virgil Thomson—i.e., the two critics who had championed the work of the Judson Dance Theater artists and Cage and his associates, respectively. Baraka’s longstanding friendship with and promotion of Shepp, along with the personal animosity between Dixon and Baraka, surely fostered an ambivalent relationship to the Guild for the young saxophonist. Rudd and Tchicai were also pursuing opportunities with Baraka during their tenure in the Guild, and once Baraka relocated to Harlem, his strident black nationalism was a better fit for the Afrocentric cosmology of Sun Ra than the interracial coalition of the Guild.<sup>121</sup>

## Debates over Race

The Jazz Composers Guild was an interracial organization, but it was hardly a model of racial harmony. To comprehend fully how various discourses of race were colliding

<sup>117</sup> Allen, “Bernard Stollman: The ESP-Disk Story.”

<sup>118</sup> LeRoi Jones, “Strong Voices in Today’s Black Music,” *Down Beat*, February 10, 1966, 15.

<sup>119</sup> Robert Levin, “Some Observations on the State of the Scene,” *Sounds and Fury*, July-August 1965, 5.

<sup>120</sup> Sun Ra began recording *The Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra*, vol. 1, on April 20 (Szwed, *Space Is the Place*, 215–216), while Greene did not enter the studio until December, when he recorded with his own quartet (that featured saxophonist Marion Brown and bassist Henry Grimes) and with Patty Waters (“Black Is the Color of My True Love’s Hair”). See Burton Greene, *Cluster Quartet*, ESPCD 1024, 2003 (orig. 1966), compact disc; and Patty Waters, *Patty Waters Sings* ESPCD 1025, 2003 (orig. 1966), compact disc.

<sup>121</sup> “For some, Sun Ra became our resident philosopher,” wrote Baraka in *Autobiography*, 298.

in and around the organization, it is necessary to briefly consider the wider terrain of race in the U.S. generally, and more specifically within the sphere of jazz discourse, in the avant-garde jazz underground of New York City, and finally within the Guild itself during this time period. Ruth Frankenberg has described the two decades following WWII as a period of transition between two paradigms of understanding race in the U.S.<sup>122</sup> The first comprises a pair of discursive strategies, “color-evasiveness” and “power-evasiveness,” which were part of an antiracist response to the discourse of biological essentialism, the dominant theory of race until the 1920s. By evading questions of color and power, this paradigm asserts that we are all the same under the skin, that we all have the same chances to succeed materially, and that any explicit marking of race in public discourse is both impolite and evidence of racial “prejudice.” While color- and power-evasiveness willfully turns away from the structural inequalities of race by emphasizing the attitudes of individuals, the competing paradigm, which Frankenberg terms “race cognizance,” draws attention to racial difference and how it is constituted culturally, socially, and economically as “a fundamentally structuring feature of U.S. society.”<sup>123</sup> In more historically specific terms, this was a transition between melting-pot assimilationism and the nationalist movements of the 1960s, but I concur with Frankenberg that the two discourses continue to frame our thinking about race in the present moment, with evasion of color and power still occupying the dominant position in racial thinking, despite the increasing presence of race cognizance in the public arena.

The heated debates over race and culture in the jazz world of the early and middle 1960s were in essence a struggle between the discourse of color- and power-evasiveness held by most white musicians, critics, record producers, and club owners, and the paradigm of race cognizance increasingly deployed by African American musicians, artists and writer/critics.<sup>124</sup> The frank commentary on race and power offered by such musicians as Mingus, Roach, Lincoln, Shepp, and Sonny Rollins was met with hostile accusations of “Crow Jim” (or “reverse racism,” in contemporary parlance) from the critical establishment, who had been schooled in evasion of color and power as the proper and appropriate response to discussions about race, a worldview that perceived a black nationalist organization such as the Nation of Islam to be just as racist as a white supremacist group like the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>125</sup> At the same time, there were different types of race cognizance in circulation during these years. The racial consciousness of the Black Arts writers, critics, and musicians—Baraka, Neal, Spellman, Shepp, Graves, and others—was characterized by a radical polarization of positions. This polarization was perhaps best summarized by the title of a panel discussion sponsored by *Liberator*

<sup>122</sup> See Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), especially chapters 1 (“Introduction: Points of Departure, Points of Return”) and 6 (“Thinking Through Race”). Frankenberg’s analysis is grounded in Omi’s and Winant’s influential theory of racial formation. See Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1986).

<sup>123</sup> Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*, 14.

<sup>124</sup> For more on the subject of race consciousness in 1960s jazz, see Ronald M. Radano, *New Musical Figurations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 63–72.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 32–33.



magazine in 1965: “Is Pro-Black Necessarily Anti-White?”<sup>126</sup> Though these separatist and militant impulses are often identified with Stokely Carmichael’s assertion of “Black Power!” in the summer of 1966, this strain of black nationalism was clearly coming into form several years earlier. By contrast, Dixon subscribed to a race cognizant position that differed in important ways from both the separatism of Baraka and the color- and power-evasiveness of white jazz musicians and critics. As the organizer and leader of the Guild, Dixon’s complex perspective on race created points of both agreement and contention with the more race-conscious black players and their rather apolitical white comrades.

Dixon was not sympathetic to the aims and rhetoric of such black nationalist figures as Neal, Spellman, and Baraka, whom he criticized for his “constant pitting of the sociological with the musical.”<sup>127</sup> Dixon doubted the genuineness of their commitment: “My problem with the black nationalists as a group ... was that it was a bunch of rhetoric. It was never going anywhere.... Two words of Swahili does not make you a knowing African.”<sup>128</sup> As a believer in some of the most basic tenets of the avant garde—i.e., the possibility of musical progress and the need for innovative individuals—Dixon also objected to the cultural nationalist search for African origins. “They’re going backwards,” he remarks, “They want to beat drums, they want to think that the Africans are doing this.”

Dixon also questioned the radical bona fides of Baraka and his comrades in the Black Arts Repertory Theatre and School (BARTS). Referring to the fact that BARTS activities were funded through more than \$200,000 in grants from HARYOU (Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited), a city-level administrator program for federal anti-poverty funds, Dixon comments,

The reason Jones and all of those people were against me was that they thought I was a traitor by forming an organization that allowed whites in it. Now here’s the way I looked at it ... : they are forming their all-black organizations, and applying to the government for funds to be rebellious. And they don’t see the ambiguity there.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>126</sup> “Is Pro-Black Necessarily Anti-White?,” *Liberator*, August 1965, 8. As Jason Robinson and Eric Porter point out, Shepp’s position on black nationalism and revolutionary politics differed from Baraka’s, despite the similarity of their rhetoric. In the course of an important panel discussion in December 1965 (transcribed and printed serially in *Jazz* in 1966), Shepp articulates a class-based analysis of racial oppression, and resists the radical polarization of black and white that was central to the Black Arts writers and thinkers. See Robinson, “The Challenge of the Changing Same,” 27, and Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz? African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 200–207. In an interview by Lawrence Neal published in *Liberator*, Shepp remarked, “I think that the whole question of nationalism has really confused the issue.” Archie Shepp, in Lawrence P. Neal, “A Conversation with Archie Shepp,” *Liberator*, November 1965, 24. In fact, in the years to come, the split became more pronounced. In an issue of *Cricket* (the cultural nationalist journal that Amiri Baraka published in 1968–1969), a review by Mwanafunzi Katibu of Shepp’s *Three for a Quarter, One for a Dime* castigated the saxophonist, who “hasn’t, lost his, soul. Yet.” The critic thought that Shepp had been spending too much time with his (white) trombonist Rudd: “He [Shepp] need [sic] to come back to us. Before it’s too late, let Rudds senseibility [sic] crawl in a corner and die.” Mwanafunzi Katibu, “Archie Shepp, Impulse AS-916, Three for a Quarter, One for a Dime,” *Cricket* 4 (1969), 26.

<sup>127</sup> “Dixon Digs at Jones,” 8.

<sup>128</sup> Dixon, interview by the author, August 16, 2006.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

Jerry G. Watts also points out that BARTS loses its sting as a revolutionary undertaking when one considers that the administration of President Lyndon Johnson viewed HARYOU as a means to temporarily pacify a population that was on the edge of exploding into open rebellion. “For Jones and others to write about the creation of BART as a radicalizing event without confronting its conservative political impact is to hide the theater’s paradoxical reality,” Watts writes. “While Jones believed that his dramatic productions and jazz concerts were educational, it seems clear that the state viewed them as tranquillizing entertainment.”<sup>130</sup>

Neal was a central figure in the Black Arts movement, which he referred to as the “spiritual sister” of black power. In 1965, he articulated his view of who was—and who was not—the proper audience for black cultural production: “Recognition from dominant white society should not be the *primary* aim of the Black artist. He must decide that his art belongs primarily to his own people.”<sup>131</sup> It is not difficult to interpret these words in the context of concerts given by the Jazz Composers Guild to majority white audiences. Neal and his colleagues in the nascent Black Arts movement were interested in framing the new black experimental music as a continuation of the African American jazz tradition, which in a polarized nationalist rhetoric, was a powerful symbol of blackness. There was no room in this perspective for black music to have an audience of white people on the Upper West Side or in the West Village. The preferable alternative for advocates of black nationalism was to be found at sites like BARTS, where “the community and the artist could meet each other in a harmonious and natural setting.”<sup>132</sup>

If white audiences were off limits for the Black Arts, then white musicians were also the targets of critical attacks. In his review of the “Four Days in December,” Spellman singled out the Free Form Improvisation Ensemble (FFIE)—the festival’s only majority-white group—for his strongest criticism.<sup>133</sup> By observing that the band played “on the conservatory level,” Spellman was casting them as the kind of effete dabblers who did not belong in an authentic jazz setting, a trope that turns on the long-standing equation of black culture with non-institutional pedagogy and corporate-sponsored mass media (as opposed to noncommercial or academic discourses).<sup>134</sup> The most interesting part of Spellman’s response to the FFIE comes when, echoing Morgenstern’s comments on the October Revolution, he points out that “much of their music has little to do with

<sup>130</sup> Jerry G. Watts, *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 157–158.

<sup>131</sup> Laurence [sic] P. Neal, “The Genius and the Prize,” *Liberator*, October 1965, 11.

<sup>132</sup> L. P. Neal, “Black Revolution in Music,” *Liberator*, September 1965, 15. The words are Neal’s, but he is summarizing the thoughts of Milford Graves.

<sup>133</sup> It is Dixon’s opinion that none of the Black Arts writers around Baraka knew that Silva was black until he started playing in Sun Ra’s band (Sun Ra never hired white players).

<sup>134</sup> Spellman, “Jazz at the Judson,” 151. Spellman did not make a blanket condemnation of all white players on the festival. In fact, he responded somewhat favorably to Carla Bley, Mantler, and Rudd. My point is simply to note that the FFIE was the only majority white ensemble on the series. For more on the cultural politics of black “academic” music, see George E. Lewis, “Experimental Music in Black and White: The AACM in New York, 1970–1985,” in *Uptown Conversation*, eds. Robert G. O’Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 75–79.

jazz.”<sup>135</sup> He continues, “Why were they here? Dixon says he didn’t want the Guild to be thought [of as] an all-black organization, which seems to me an unnecessary hang-up, especially since more than ten white musicians appeared in the series, and since two other groups were lead by white musicians.”<sup>136</sup> Spellman seems to be doing two things at once: first, he *implies* that the Guild should be an all-black organization; and second, he *states* that *if* it is going to be interracial, then Rudd, Mantler, Carla Bley, and Paul Bley (whose performance Spellman mentioned, but did not review) were sufficient as white representatives.

In this context, Dixon’s invitation to the white musicians of the FFIE to join the Guild, and his interest in creating and presenting “both jazz and non-jazz,” marked him as an enemy of the black nationalist imperative to close down interaction with European history and culture. Such a prohibition on fraternizing with the enemy was articulated by Graves, one musician who followed Baraka into doctrinal cultural nationalism, who told Neal in 1965, “The Black musician must withdraw from the Western concept and economic thing.”<sup>137</sup> Picking up the thread from Spellman, Graves also criticized the Guild for including white members. “Graves believes that this organization should have been all *Black*,” Neal summarized, “because our musicians face greater problems than white musicians.”<sup>138</sup> As the jazz scholar John Gennari points out, Baraka was becoming a “master of incendiary anti-white rhetoric” after the spring of 1965, and his “blacker-than-thou posture not only put a torch to the Martin Luther King–led civil rights movement vision of an interracial beloved community, but also cordoned off black culture as a blacks-only space, a culture whites did not have the biological and mental equipment to feel and perceive.”<sup>139</sup>

It is important to note that black nationalism was also a discourse of gender that turned on tropes of masculinity and patriarchy; in the words of the sociologist Winifred Breines, “The black males stood center stage, strong, proud, and furious, a crucial building block in the imagery of black nationalism. His rage anchored the movement.”<sup>140</sup> In the jazz milieu, this gender patterning prescribed desirable aesthetic qualities based on gendered codes of musical meaning—the qualities most admired were volume, “raw” and extreme emotion, dominating tone, and virtuosic displays of hand and breath control. Indeed, this discourse of masculinity provided a set of values and a vocabulary through which the hostility between Dixon and the Black Arts writers

<sup>135</sup> Spellman, “Jazz at the Judson,” 151. Friedman told me that he, for one, never thought that the music of FFIE was “jazz.” Friedman, interview by the author.

<sup>136</sup> Spellman, “Jazz at the Judson,” 151.

<sup>137</sup> Neal, “Black Revolution in Music,” 15. In a short article published in *Liberator* in 1967, Graves was more specific: “Western thought in this sense has only limited and deprived the Afro-American of his own inner knowledge.” See Milford Graves and Don Pullen, “Black Music,” *Liberator*, January 1967, 20. Perhaps referring to the title of the first article, Dixon told an audience at the December 1965 *Jazz* panel discussion, “I never even heard of a revolution in jazz until I produced the October Revolution, never heard the word used, you see.” See “Jazz and Revolutionary Black Nationalism,” *Jazz*, May 1967, 38.

<sup>138</sup> Neal, “Black Revolution in Music,” 15.

<sup>139</sup> John Gennari, *Blowin’ Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 283.

<sup>140</sup> Winifred Breines, *The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 55–56.

could be enacted, and it was perhaps because the trumpeter's musical style *avoided* the tropes of dominant free jazz masculinity that Baraka and Spellman in particular criticized Dixon's playing. (Spellman's observation that Dixon's "lips are too soft because of lack of practice" is one representative swipe.)<sup>141</sup> As Fred Moten argues, the stabilized heteronormativity of the Black Arts movement was conditioned by the downtown bohemian scene that preceded the 1965 turn toward black nationalism. It was here in the East Village in the early 1960s that Baraka and his circle of black artists and intellectuals joined their white comrades in resisting bourgeois, white normativity, an opposition that Moten links with non-normative sexual practices: same-race homosexuality, interracial homosexuality, and interracial heterosexuality. However, these transgressive sexualities were recast as deviant by Baraka when he moved uptown in 1965—it is through his break with Village bohemia that Baraka refigured this community as a *white* bohemia, and the site of sexually deviant transgressions of weak, effeminate white men. In this way, the discursive poles of a strong, black, male heterosexuality and a soft, white, male homosexuality fall quickly into place, animating Baraka's writing in this period.<sup>142</sup>

The stark binarization of the Black Arts racial discourse brought it precariously close to the kind of biological essentialism that characterized racial formation until the 1920s. Before reaching such a damaging conclusion, however, it is necessary to consider the crucial difference between the essentialisms of the 1920s and those of the 1960s. Etienne Balibar refers to "the cycle of historical reciprocity of nationalism and racism," with each term constantly emerging out of the other, both being components of "a historical system of complementary exclusions and dominations which are mutually interconnected."<sup>143</sup> In the U.S., Balibar writes, "the systematic institution of segregation, which put a halt to the first civil rights movement, coincided with America's entry into world imperialist competition and with its subscribing to the idea that the Nordic races have a hegemonic mission." In other words, the racism of segregation emerged out of the nationalism of US imperialism.<sup>144</sup> In the 1960s, the persistence of structural and individual racism and the failure of the theory of ethnic assimilation to address and remedy the exclusion of African Americans from mainstream institutions led this aggrieved population (and others) to positively claim its racial difference, and to use this claim to build solidarity and strengthen its political fortitude—a third-world nationalism born from the effects of racism. Each of these essentialist moments—the racist pseudoscience of the 1920s and black nationalism of the 1960s—is embedded in a social hierarchy, and the difference between their positions is critical. In the words of Balibar, "We have no right whatever to equate the nationalism of the dominant with

<sup>141</sup> Spellman, "Jazz at the Judson," 150.

<sup>142</sup> Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). See, for example, LeRoi Jones, "American Sexual Reference: Black Male," 1965; repr. in LeRoi Jones, *Home: Social Essays* (New York: William Morrow, 1966), 216. I regret that space considerations prohibit a fuller treatment of gender here, but see also Benjamin Piekut, "New Thing? Gender and Sexuality in the Jazz Composers Guild," *American Quarterly* 62 (March 2010), forthcoming.

<sup>143</sup> Etienne Balibar, "Racism and Nationalism," in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, eds. Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (London: Verso, 1991), 53, 49. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

that of the dominated, the nationalism of liberation with the nationalism of conquest.”<sup>145</sup>

The notion of purity was a key element in the discursive repertoire of this milieu, and the theorists of the Black Arts movement and the Guild both deployed a rigid rhetoric of purity. Baraka and his associates constructed black nationalism on a foundation of cultural purity; any association with or involvement in what was thought to be “European,” “Western,” or white was condemned. They viewed these types of interactions not as positive instances of hybridity, dialogue, interactivity, or code-switching, but rather as simple examples of corruption.<sup>146</sup> The Black Arts movement derived strength and passion from this formulation of a pure African American essence, based as it was on the historical retention of African cultural elements. In his important 1966 essay on black music, “The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music),” Baraka (as Jones) attempted to chart this mutable essence as it appeared in both rhythm and blues and avant-garde jazz, or “New Black Music,” and paid particular attention to how the “blues impulse” in both of these musics interacts with the “whitening” influences of commercialism and formal training.<sup>147</sup>

Like the Black Arts theorists, Dixon felt that his radical solution to an oppressive social and economic environment necessitated a theoretically pure position from which he could attempt his transformation of mainstream jazz institutions. He sought to move beyond the exploitation of the jazz industry by cutting off all interaction and withdrawing to a pristine space uncontaminated by compromise. Indeed, Dixon remembers that his position was the most extreme in the Guild—recall that he was the only one who wanted to completely withdraw the music from the market. The commitment to purity also informed his criticism of BARTS for accepting governmental funds to finance their undertaking. In his view, one either separates completely from hegemonic networks, or one is colluding with them. Such rigorously pure positions reached their breaking point in the 1960s, with the clarity and plain truths of past eras dissolving quickly into the complexity of late modernity. It seems necessary to question the long-term efficacy of any strategy that surrenders or ignores the potentially positive, enabling, and productive aspects of ambivalence, partial participation, multiple allegiances, and polyvalent tactics. Indeed, the “purity-fixation” of Dixon and the Black Arts writers indicates some measure of naiveté about viable tactics for transforming a complex and contradictory social sphere.

The positions of both parties were compromised in some way. While Dixon used purity to criticize the Black Arts for accepting federal assistance, he also had to explain his own decision to resist the exclusion of white musicians and to refuse withdrawing his music from white audiences. As he pointed out to Levin in 1965, white musicians were treated better than black ones, “significantly better, but not much better—that’s

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>146</sup> Again, Moten provides a challenging alternative interpretation. Heavily indebted to Derrida, Moten views the binary of black and white—and its chain of associated oppositions such as East-West, spirit-materiality, ecstasy-stasis, emotion-structure, and improvisation-composition—being resisted and exploded by the very music that animated so much of Baraka’s radical critique. See Moten, *In the Break*, 129.

<sup>147</sup> LeRoi Jones, “The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music),” in *Black Music*, 178–211.

why they're in the guild."<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, the purity of principle with which Dixon sought to transform the jazz establishment did not mean that he would ignore white listeners. He comments, "How are you going to function in a predominantly white society and ignore the white musicians who are virtually in the same situation that you're in ... ? We never performed before any black audience, for God's sake. I was desperately trying to get young blacks to come, [or] as much as I could without cowering to them."<sup>149</sup>

Harold Cruse's description of the early 1960s as a moment of transition between two generations of black political activism suggests another way to interpret the conflict between Dixon's interracialism and the Black Arts' separatism. According to Cruse, for the previous forty years white communists and liberal organizers had instilled in black leaders the urgent need for interracialism as the only viable political strategy to combat racism, poverty, and imperialism. Specifically, Cruse was referring to the Popular Front ideology of the national Communist Party in the 1930s and the liberal paternalism of the 1940s and 1950s, which severed any historical continuity between the young black activists of the 1960s and the pan-Africanism of Marcus Garvey in the 1920s. "Every other ethnic group in America, a 'nation of nations,' has accepted the fact of its separateness and used it to its own social advantage," Cruse wrote, "but the Negro's conditioning has steered him into that perpetual state of suspended tension wherein ninety-five per cent of his time and energy is expended on fighting prejudice in whites."<sup>150</sup> Younger intellectuals like Baraka and Neal had swung widely to the other side in their virulent hatred of whites. Cruse observed, "Negroes had become so deeply mired in an institutionalized form of political interracialism that they could not break with it unless sufficient hatred were mustered to avoid the necessity of apologizing to whites for excluding them." Cruse was critical of both moments; though he argued for the assertion of ethnic separateness, he also condemned the Black Arts movement for claiming a leadership position without first developing a social, economic, political, or cultural analysis of the plight of African Americans.<sup>151</sup>

Dixon was nearly forty years old at the time of the October Revolution, while most of the musicians and intellectuals associated with Black Arts were in their twenties. These younger figures included Shepp (27), Graves (23), Spellman (29), Neal (27), and Baraka, who turned 30 years old the week of the festival. Generational tension seems to have been in play. In his earlier Greenwich Village bohemian period, Baraka had already exhibited a mild contempt for his elders. In his 1960 essay "Cuba Libre," in

<sup>148</sup> Dixon quoted in Levin, "The Jazz Composers Guild," 17.

<sup>149</sup> Dixon, interview by the author, August 16, 2006. That the majority of the audience was white was not disputed by Spellman, who had observed that the audience was two-thirds white "in most downtown and midtown *avant-garde* jazz concerts, and a great many of those Negroes present [are] jazz musicians." Spellman, "Jazz at the Judson," 150 (emphasis in the original). Over the years, Graves has changed his position on white audiences, observing, "If it wasn't for white folks, this music would be *dead!*" Graves, interview by the author.

<sup>150</sup> Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Historical Analysis of the Failure of Black Leadership* (1967; repr. New York: New York Review Books, 2005), 364.

<sup>151</sup> Cruse wrote: "If Negroes were actually thinking and functioning on a mature political level, then the exclusion of whites—organizationally and politically—should be based not on hatred but on strategy." Cruse, *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, 365.

which he detailed his trip to Cuba (earlier that year) as part of a delegation of black writers and intellectuals, Baraka described his disappointment with the “1920’s ‘New Negro’ type” and “1930’s type” writers in the group, none of whom he considered “important.”<sup>152</sup> According to Cruse, this disdain carried over into the writer’s nationalist phase: “Jones [Baraka] once threatened to picket the NAACP, for no other reason than that it represented the old guard, of which Jones was contemptuous.”<sup>153</sup> By the fall of 1964 and into 1965, Baraka and his group had begun verbally (and sometimes physically) attacking whites in public. It seems that Dixon, however, remained committed to educating whites about the evils of racism, as can be seen in the panel discussions that Dixon moderated at the October Revolution in Jazz, where he guided his “almost exclusively white” audience through heated considerations of the structures of inequality that plagued African American musicians in New York. Dixon’s memory of these panels articulates this pedagogical aim rather explicitly, and it is worth quoting at length:

In hindsight, the panels would not have been a success if ... everyone wasn’t at least being made aware of something, thinking about it, and wanted to be a part of it. Whether anything was done after they left that room or not—that’s another point. The thing was, I am convinced that certain things were said and done ... [that] people were stuck with as knowledge for the rest of their lives.... [S]entiments expressed, ideas, and factual data presented about what was happening right in the most cosmopolitan city in the world, which people could hear and think “Gee, I didn’t [know that].” They could not say that after they finished four days of those panels—“I didn’t know black musicians wanted to play in the New York Philharmonic.”<sup>154</sup>

Once he had formed the Guild, Dixon continued to raise awareness among his white colleagues about the realities of racism. Indeed, he told Robert Levin in 1965 that the civil rights struggle and the racist structures of the jazz establishment “represent vast problems of which very few people have any real awareness or even the desire to be aware.”<sup>155</sup> This position on interracialism and integration—though frowned upon by Cruse (writing in the 1960s) as an unhealthy fixation on white society—grew out of what Dixon saw as the social reality of the New Thing. In his 1967 review of Spellman’s *Four Lives in the Bebop Business*, Dixon pointedly observed that whites are

in effect the only audience that this music has. None of the new music is played in Negro neighborhoods, Negro colleges or universities and neither do black people purchase in any numbers of consequence any of the recordings. So when it is constantly noted that this music has a following, one has to be aware of who the following is.<sup>156</sup>

Who *was* “the following”? Though he felt that the New Thing spoke for the black community, Baraka left his bohemian life in the Village to cultivate a following for the

<sup>152</sup> LeRoi Jones, “Cuba Libre,” in *Home: Social Essays*, 13.

<sup>153</sup> Cruse, *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, 363.

<sup>154</sup> Dixon, interview by the author, August 15, 2006.

<sup>155</sup> Levin, “The Jazz Composers Guild,” 17.

<sup>156</sup> William R. Dixon, “Jazz through Four Innovators,” a review of *Four Lives in the Be-Bop Business*, by A. B. Spellman, *Freedomways*, Summer 1967, 257.

new jazz (and African American theatre and letters) among the black poor in Harlem. The contradiction that resulted—recycling the Black Arts to the masses who were supposed to have been represented by them in the first place—did not escape Baraka, who later commented, “Really most of the black intellectuals there, even though all of us lived in Harlem, were still not part of the whole organic, dynamics of the community. We were sort of, I think, superficial to the community even with the Black Arts.”<sup>157</sup> Graves also recalls that neighborhood audiences in Harlem were often quite hostile to the New Thing, and on one occasion they bombarded Graves’s band with boos and even eggs. Asked about the audiences for events in the BARTS building, he replied, “Average folks? No way. People from the neighborhood hardly ever came in there.”<sup>158</sup> The basic split between Baraka and the community he claimed to speak for cast the writer as a bourgeois nationalist who lectured the black masses on how to be black, and this authoritarian streak was one of the things that Dixon found repellent about the Black Arts movement at the time. “I didn’t want to be controlled and work under people who had to get their finances from a group of people that they claimed were holding them down,” he recounts. “All I want is the freedom to be able to do whatever I think I’m able to do. I don’t want some half-ass over here editing me.”<sup>159</sup>

The will to self-actualization evident in Dixon’s comment raises an important point about the type of organization that the Guild actually was. Though their aim was to elevate the status of the New Thing as a whole, the Guild was a collection of individuals who banded together because of the strength that accrues in a group. And though Dixon has devoted his life to advancing the position of new black music, he has undertaken this project primarily with the aim of clearing space for himself as an artist to pursue his work without any obstacles or editorial oversight. This is a very different philosophy of commitment and communalism than the one employed by the Black Arts—for all its somewhat overblown claims to leadership of the black masses, the latter movement was still one for community, and it sought to find strength and unity through the naturalization of racial difference. We might call this latter perspective a strategic essentialism. Baraka’s “The Changing Same” is nothing if not an attempt to find the linkages between R&B and new black music, despite their many apparent differences. The Guild was also undoubtedly a political organization, but its politics were derived from the will to self-actualization, not group-actualization. The strength of the group was necessary only as the foundation and stepping-stone toward aesthetic self-making. This is the key difference between the Guild and the Black Arts. For Dixon, the freedom he pursued was the freedom to actualize his own aesthetics, which was a position not far removed from that of the white bohemians in the Village that Baraka

<sup>157</sup> “Interview: Imamu Amiri Baraka,” *The Black Collegian*, quoted in Watts, *Amiri Baraka*, 170. Shepp also doubted whether avant-garde jazz had a place in Harlem. “I think it would be very difficult for Cecil or Ornette or myself to just go up to Harlem and expect to be accepted right away—as good as our intentions may be,” he told Neal in an interview. Neal, “A Conversation with Archie Shepp,” 24. For two excellent summaries and analyses of Baraka’s changing formulations of black nationalism and its relationship to black music, see Porter, *What Is This Thing*, 193–207; and Gennari, *Blowin’ Hot and Cool*, 264–89.

<sup>158</sup> Graves, interview by the author.

<sup>159</sup> Dixon, interview by the author, August 16, 2006.



was escaping in the spring of 1965.<sup>160</sup> For these white experimentalists, “freedom” meant only the freedom to create and publicize their own work.<sup>161</sup>

Dixon’s project would always differ from these European American artists, however. Though he wished to have his work received on the same terms as that of other serious avant-garde composers, such a reception was denied to him by the racial connotations of the jazz tradition that he was continually associated with. This fundamental fact insured that he could never push social and political matters to the background, for merely attempting to write music and have it performed under the conditions that white composers would have taken for granted brought him into confrontation with the racial discourse of musical creativity. This constituted the first obstacle that Dixon negotiated as a composer—i.e., that his work was automatically relegated to the discursive field of jazz, where it was rejected because it did not “swing” or properly extend “the tradition.” The second obstacle was the “difficulty” of avant-garde music for audiences of any tradition. For the white players in the New Thing, and especially those in the Guild, this element of innovative music—and, consequently, the struggle to create and maintain an audience for avant-garde work—was an obstacle they faced along with Dixon. They identified with his desire to create a “non-jazz” arena for the production and distribution of their work, but remained racially unmarked, and thus free from facing Dixon’s first obstacle. Indeed, because most of the white members in the Guild employed a racial discourse of color- and power-evasion, they overlooked the possibility of a society structured in dominance, and they assumed that the *only* problem facing avant-garde jazz musicians was an unsympathetic critical community, disinterested club owners, and record companies that were too timid to take a chance on the new music. Mantler, for example, joined the organization because their work—whether “jazz” or not—was not being performed: “The music was very difficult, and was indeed ‘new,’ and at times, rather unpleasant and noncommercial. So it was obviously limited to a small audience like any avant-garde music normally is.”<sup>162</sup> Mantler recalls that the Guild was initially much more concerned with the practical matters of promoting itself and putting on concerts, but as time wore on, some of the African American members began to center on issues of race and politics in their meetings. He further notes

I was interested in music. I had no interest in this being a political organization—black/white and stuff. To me, it was political in a social sense that that music could not be performed. People who were in that music could not make a living doing it. So that was the issue. And that’s what I think it started out being, then later, because certain people were more colorful ... than others, it just got bogged down by endless discussions and screaming matches.<sup>163</sup>

<sup>160</sup> A later change in context for Dixon led to a different position on group actualization: in the early 1970s, as a professor at Bennington College, Dixon founded the Black Music Division, a program he led until his retirement in 1996. See Dewar, *This Is an American Music*.

<sup>161</sup> See Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).

<sup>162</sup> Mantler, telephone interview by the author.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

While Mantler's opinion that the political "is never good for music" was perhaps the most extreme position, several of his white colleagues were confused by or resistant to the attention being drawn to issues of race. The various comments of Paul Bley, Greene, Gary William Friedman, and Carla Bley on the racial turn of the Guild range from hostile to naive. In his typically acerbic tone, Paul Bley writes, "What a bunch of wounded souls there were at these meetings." He further recalled in his 1999 autobiography:

Talk about group therapy. It was nothing for someone to stand up at a meeting and talk for two or three hours about the pain that they felt, the struggle—inter-group, inter-race, inter-class, inter-family, inter-musical, inter-*everything*. The next night, the working nucleus of the Guild would get together and do all the work.<sup>164</sup>

Though Greene was the victim of a pointed critique from Baraka in *Down Beat* (where the critic implied that Greene was unable to assimilate the "black spirit-energy sound" of his African American bandmates Pharoah Sanders and Marion Brown), the pianist maintained that race was unimportant to the major figures in the music.<sup>165</sup> "[I] still feel that was a great period," he remarks, "and I must say that the innovators of this music—and we all know who they are—don't have time for this petty, penny-ante shit. They're color-blind. They're busy with some much bigger issues."<sup>166</sup> The comments of saxophonist Friedman—who was a member of the FFIE, but not of the Guild—are also representative of a color-evasive approach to music and race: "It never occurred to me who was black and who was white, and who was gay and who was straight, and who was a Jew.... It didn't matter to me, the only thing that mattered was the music that I played."<sup>167</sup>

For white musicians, interested as they were in "the music itself," the frequent forays into social and political issues during Guild meetings seemed like diversions or distractions from the main issue. Rudd commented to Taylor once after a meeting that he knew that paranoia can be a good thing at times, but that perhaps it was dominating the tone of the discussion and keeping them from dealing with business at hand. Taylor responded that they still had far to go: "We were in the process of something, and that stuff would have to be worked out. But he agreed with me, that time was getting wasted some of the time."<sup>168</sup> Taylor's comments—as relayed by Rudd—indicate that there was a fundamental disagreement about the value of examining these issues thoroughly. Though Taylor could recognize that the meetings were not models of efficiency, he continued to believe that matters of race were essential to their conversations about self-determination and the promotion of their work.

Carla Bley recalls that the white Guild members simply did not understand the anger of some of the black musicians, a failure of empathy and identification that

<sup>164</sup> Paul Bley and David Lee, *Stopping Time: Paul Bley and the Transformation of Jazz* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1999), 92.

<sup>165</sup> LeRoi Jones, "The Burton Greene Affair," *Down Beat*, August 25, 1965, 13.

<sup>166</sup> Greene, telephone interview by the author.

<sup>167</sup> Friedman, interview by the author.

<sup>168</sup> Rudd, interview by the author, October 5, 2006.

undermined their interest in building an interracial coalition.<sup>169</sup> The white members of the organization thought all jazz musicians were in the same situation—black and white, they were scratching out a living playing the music they loved. Greene remembers that, for him, black nationalism meant that people who used to be his friends no longer spoke to him. He recalled, “One black guy at the time said to me, ‘Hey man, ... why are you playing this game, man? Why don’t you take it easy, go work in your father’s bank?’ I said, ‘What father’s bank? My father struggled for years on the road selling eyeglasses—he was never a banker.’”<sup>170</sup> Greene’s point is well taken, but also shows an inability to recognize the power of whiteness and his own position in a social hierarchy—this broader level of ethnic privilege is what was implied by the reference to his “father’s bank.” Regardless of whether it was true that all the members of the Guild were equally poverty-stricken and bereft of work, the general notion that they had identical experiences of deprivation disappointed and angered black musicians who felt that their racial oppression was not being recognized by others in the group. While white players believed that through jazz they were forging interracial bonds of empathy and cooperation (and in many ways, they were), Dixon reminds us that the signal difference was that the whites *chose* to play the music, while blacks simply had no other options.<sup>171</sup>

Though Dixon resisted the polarizing stance of black nationalist writers, this did not mean he was not race cognizant. Indeed, he clearly registered the impact of race on the internal dynamics of the Guild, as the following comment to Levin makes clear:

Even in the [G]uild, which is comprised of some very intelligent people, there has been a subtle, but apparent, indignation on the part of the white members (and this is something I think nearly all white men have in them) that a black man ... myself, Cecil ... could conceive and execute an idea that would be intelligent and beneficial to all.<sup>172</sup>

With such an acute attention to racial divisions, it comes as no surprise that—according to Dixon—votes in the organization proceeded along racial lines, though Mantler and Rudd have no memory of this. Indeed, Graves recalls a palpable racial tension in the meeting he visited in 1964. Referring to what he heard in private, he comments, “I used to say to myself, ‘I wonder if the white guys are talking about the black cats like the black

<sup>169</sup> Carla Bley, telephone interview by the author. I am drawing here on Winifred Breines’s work on the misunderstanding, distrust, and anger that characterized interactions between black and white socialist feminists in the 1960s and 1970s. See Winifred Breines, “What’s Love Got to Do with It?: White Women, Black Women, and Feminism in the Movement Years,” *Signs* 27 (Summer 2002): 1095–1133. See also Breines, *The Trouble Between Us*.

<sup>170</sup> Greene, telephone interview by the author.

<sup>171</sup> Relevant to this discussion is George E. Lewis’s explanation of the differences between Eurological and Afrological approaches to history and music making. He argues that the Afrological—historically emergent rather than biologically ordained—is based upon recognition of social difference and the importance of personal and collective history, while the Eurological seeks to transcend difference and escape personal and collective history. See George E. Lewis, “Improvvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives,” *Black Music Research Journal* 16 (1996): 91–123.

<sup>172</sup> Levin, “The Jazz Composers Guild,” 17. In a 1965 letter to *Sounds and Fury* editor Taylor Castell, Dixon addressed the “collective White American you,” and again stressed the inability of white America “to accept any kind of leadership from black Americans.” “Bill Dixon,” *Sounds and Fury*, July–August 1965, 39.

cats are talking about the white guys when we're not with each other....' People didn't understand that there was suspicion of white people at the time."<sup>173</sup>

According to Mantler, there were varying degrees of race-cognizance in the Guild. Shepp and Sun Ra (in his own intergalactic way) were particularly outspoken, while Tchicai adopted a more color- and power-evasive position. In a 1966 profile by Morgenstern (with the somewhat patronizing title "John Tchicai: A Calm Member of the Avant-Garde"), Tchicai revealed a position similar to Mantler's: "Whether you are a black or a white artist, if you are playing the new music that people haven't been exposed to, it's obvious that you will meet a lot of resistance, and you can't fall back and blame it on the black and white thing."<sup>174</sup> Silva was also critical of nationalism, insisting that, "If I had a band I wanted it *integrated*—I support this great tradition. Free jazz was later thrown in with Black Power and I don't agree with that."<sup>175</sup>

Carla Bley interpreted this prolonged discussion of race as a personal rejection, one that would eventually lead to her own growing race consciousness. She told a critic that, upon returning from Europe in 1967, "I began to get an overview of myself as a white woman.... I realized I had European roots, so why was I trying to find African roots? I'd been like a bastard—if you're a bastard, you don't inherit. I decided if they don't want me, I don't want them."<sup>176</sup> Greene has also written that the criticism he received as a white musician contributed to his decision to leave New York for Paris in 1969: "This stuff was symbolic of what a lot of creative, sensitive people who just happened to be White had to put up with in the '60s from, often Black, writers who put down anything with White origins that happened in America."<sup>177</sup> Though Greene understood why the circle around Baraka wanted to make sure that the white critical establishment recognized the cultural origins of the music, he thought that their attacks on white musicians hurt the overall prospects of the music by identifying it too readily with political and racial controversies. Echoing Dixon's comments on the reception of the New Thing, Greene writes that these controversies meant that "the predominantly White, middle class audiences would not support any of us, White or Black."<sup>178</sup>

### The Revolution Would Not Be Formalized

There were other incidents that undermined trust in the group. In January 1965, Paul Bley's quintet was scheduled to play a concert at the Contemporary Center during Ornette Coleman's stint at the Village Vanguard, two floors below. The nightly performances by Coleman's trio were the first public appearances by Coleman in nearly two years, making this occasion the talk of the town. Apparently unwilling to compete with such an event for listeners and attention, Paul Bley failed to show up for his engagement and absconded to Florida with money from the Guild treasury. Upon his return, Bley

<sup>173</sup> Graves, interview by the author.

<sup>174</sup> Dan Morgenstern, "John Tchicai: A Calm Member of the Avant-Garde," *Down Beat*, February 10, 1966, 49.

<sup>175</sup> Warburton, "Interviews with Alan Silva."

<sup>176</sup> Wilson, "Don't Call Carla's Jazz Jazz," 131.

<sup>177</sup> Greene, *Memoirs of a Musical "Pesty Mystic"*, 53–54.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

repaid the money, but charges were brought up and the Guild held a vote to expel him, a vote that would turn out to be evenly split (and thus unsuccessful).<sup>179</sup> On another occasion, several members visited a foundation or government agency (accounts vary) in hopes of obtaining a large grant or donated building. Though the delegation had suppressed their differences of opinion for most of the meeting and were close to securing a deal, Sun Ra chose an inopportune moment to express doubts about accepting a gift from such an institution. His spontaneous speech was enough to spook the institutional representative, and nothing came of the meeting.<sup>180</sup> Such incidents were reminders to Guild members that many of their comrades had other personal motivations and idiosyncratic standards driving their actions. In such an atmosphere of competing interests, the trust that was necessary to build consensus could never be established.

The most serious and painful breach of Guild principles involved the record contract that Shepp signed with Impulse! Records in the late summer of 1964. Almost every existing published account of the Guild has erroneously reported that Shepp signed to Impulse! during the brief existence of the collective, and that this act of self-interested careerism outraged his colleagues and compromised the integrity of the organization.<sup>181</sup> A look at the facts of his first recording, *Four for Trane*, plainly contradicts some aspects of this version of events. As the record sleeve makes clear, the album was recorded in August 1964 by Bob Thiele, who as producer for Impulse! would not have engineered the session without first signing Shepp to a deal.<sup>182</sup> That Shepp's contract was in place before the founding of the Guild is corroborated by the memory of Stollman; he recalls standing outside the Cellar Café during the October Revolution with Shepp, who cordially turned down Stollman's offer to record for ESP-Disk with the comment, "I am an Impulse[!] artist."<sup>183</sup> Thus, the bitter arguments over Shepp's contract were not concerned with his surreptitious acquisition of a solo recording gig, but rather with his continuing refusal to renegotiate the deal in light of his ostensible pledge to the principles of the Guild. In Dixon's opinion, the Impulse! contract has garnered an inordinate amount of commentary, when in fact all members of the Guild had their own fruitful contacts and individual opportunities that carried over into

<sup>179</sup> This sequence of events is corroborated by Young, *Dixonia*, 358, and author interviews with Dixon, Rudd, Greene, and Carla Bley. The incident is absent from Paul Bley's history of the Guild. See Bley and David Lee, "The Jazz Composers Guild: Dixon—Rudd—Shepp—Ra," in Bley and Lee, *Stopping Time*, 91–97.

<sup>180</sup> Described in *ibid.*, 95–96, and in Greene, telephone interview by the author, July 12, 2006.

<sup>181</sup> See Robinson, *Improvising California*, 77; Wilmer, *As Serious as Your Life*, 214–15; Anderson, *This Is Our Music*, 140; Bley and Lee, *Stopping Time*, 92. Drawing on Wilmer's account, Bakriges notes that "within a few months after Shepp's decision to leave the guild," the meetings had degenerated to chaos. Bakriges, *African American Musical Avant-Gardism*, 188–89. Yet Shepp performed on Guild concerts at the Contemporary Center on January 8 and 30, February 12 and 27, and March 26–27, about three weeks before the organization's final event. See Young, *Dixonia*, 357–65. In his memoir, Greene remembered that "secretly, behind the scenes, so-and-so was signing the tokenism record contract with Bob Thiele at Impulse[!]" Greene, *Memoirs*, 39. The lone exception that I have found is Schwartz, *New Black Music*, 377–78.

<sup>182</sup> Archie Shepp, *Four for Trane*, Impulse! IMPD-218, 1997 (orig. 1964), compact disc. As Shepp explained in a 1985 interview by Ben Sidran, the date was arranged by John Coltrane, whose assistance Shepp had requested in the weeks before. See Ben Sidran, *Talking Jazz: An Oral History*, expanded ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 251–52.

<sup>183</sup> Stollman, interview by the author.

the collective (including, for example, the negotiations of Rudd and Paul Bley with Stollman in the first few weeks of the Guild's inception). But Shepp's reticence over his recording contract was only one part of a larger pattern of omitting reference to the Guild in his public interventions, and this was made more conspicuous by the fact that Shepp was the subject or author of six articles in the mainstream jazz press in the year or so following the establishment of the Guild—two in *Jazz* (January and August, 1965), two in *Jazz Magazine* (June and December 1965), and two in *Down Beat* (January and December 1965).<sup>184</sup> This greater pattern of not promoting the Guild, its principles, or members seems to have been the issue, not simply Shepp's contract.<sup>185</sup>

No matter the cause, many members of the Guild were outraged. Greene described the contract as “hand to mouth tokenism,” and writes, “Of course a lot of us were really hungry, but we're always being tested to see if we're really serious and dedicated, if we can tighten our belts, or hold out for our basic principles.”<sup>186</sup> In 1966, Taylor told *Jazz Magazine*, “If certain members had shown themselves to be stronger and more faithful to their promises, if there had been agreement between their actions and their values, the Guild would still exist.”<sup>187</sup> Silva was also unforgiving: “Archie was bound by the bylaws of the company, and he broke the law. This, for me, who was pro-company, was out. It led to the downfall of the structure we had imposed upon ourselves.”<sup>188</sup>

Sun Ra, however, lumped Shepp's indiscretion in with those of all the other members of the Guild: “Everybody was vowing they weren't going to get put under the big companies—when everybody did but me.... But then, it's possible they were only trying to survive and that's the only way they saw to play the game.”<sup>189</sup> Survival seems to have been the motivating factor for Shepp, who said in 1994, “I wasn't into music simply to continue to be poor. I had a family.... I was moved by a different set of references.”<sup>190</sup> Carla Bley bluntly contradicted the protestations of other members of the Guild by noting, “We all would have taken that contract if it had been offered to

<sup>184</sup> The articles were Jones, “Archie Shepp Live”; Archie Shepp, “On Jazz,” *Jazz*, August 1965, 24; Carles, “Archie Shepp: Archie Méconnu”; Noames, “Archie Shepp: Shepp le Rebelle”; Jones, “Voice from the Avant-garde”; and Shepp, “An Artist Speaks Bluntly.” In the Noames interview, Shepp briefly discusses the Guild only after being prompted by the interviewer.

<sup>185</sup> I am grateful to Bill Dixon for clarifying this issue with me in a telephone conversation on January 3, 2007. He now observes that, given the amount of money that is rumored to have been involved, Shepp “would have been a fool not to accept” the deal. At the same time, Dixon maintains that one should not confuse a single artist's success—or even his later shepherding of Marion Brown, who recorded *Three for Shepp* for Impulse! under the latter's auspices in 1966—with the greater mission of the Guild: that *all* its members would be offered a contract as a complete group.

<sup>186</sup> Greene, *Memoirs of a Musical “Pesty-Mystic,”* 39.

<sup>187</sup> “Si certains membres s'étaient montrés plus forts, plus fidèles à leurs promesses, s'il y avait eu des rapports entre leur action et leurs idées, la Guilde existerait toujours.” Trans. by the author. Jean-Louis Noames, “Cecil Taylor: Le système Taylor,” *Jazz Magazine* no. 125 (December 1965), 35.

<sup>188</sup> Warburton, “Interviews with Alan Silva.”

<sup>189</sup> Fiofori, “Sun Ra's Space Odyssey,” 16.

<sup>190</sup> Bakriges, *African American Musical Avant-Gardism*, 187. Soon after the Guild folded, Shepp was more elliptical when asked by *Jazz Magazine* why Dixon had to dissolve the Guild. He replied: “For both financial reasons and racial reasons” (“A la fois pour des raisons financières et des raisons raciales.” Trans. by the author.) See Jean-Louis Noames, “Archie Shepp: Shepp le Rebelle,” *Jazz Magazine*, December 1965, 80.

us.”<sup>191</sup> Tchicai also deflects blame away from Shepp, saying “I think there was envy among some in the group as well as a dissatisfaction with those who got recording contracts and then started pulling away from the Guild’s original founding ideals.”<sup>192</sup>

These divergent responses to Shepp’s Impulse! deal indicate a basic misunderstanding about the goals of the Jazz Composers Guild, one that was seemingly in place from its inception. Dixon points out that he was attempting to fundamentally transform an economic structure that had grown up with the jazz tradition, but that restrictively channeled the creativity of black artists into a set of exploitative relationships. His long-term goals—prestige, respect, and the freedom to pursue musical projects without the oppressive label of “jazz”—could only be reached by first seizing control of the means of production and distribution of the music. Dixon was not simply withdrawing his music from the market, but was also cultivating his own audience outside the preexisting channels afforded by a racial discourse that continued to frame jazz musicians as socially deviant, irresponsible, or mere entertainers. French cultural theorist Jacques Attali refers to this process as the creation of a “parallel industry to produce and promote new music,” but Dixon was just as concerned with reorienting the flawed but powerful network of jazz production towards new, more equitable arrangements.<sup>193</sup> The creation of his counterpublic was one way to effect this reorientation.

Most of the other musicians in the Guild, however, thought of the organization as an effective marketing tool or collective promotional agreement. In this view, withdrawing the music from the market would simply increase demand and drive up the price, which would in turn lead to better opportunities for all the affiliated artists. As Dixon points out, “Their thinking was, apparently, get as much mileage out of this Guild, get better gigs, and such and such.... So you had—from the very beginning—a cleavage there.”<sup>194</sup> In an interview, Greene characterized the group as a “clearinghouse for gigs,” while Paul Bley wrote, “As it turned out, the best thing about the Guild was that it promoted all its members.”<sup>195</sup> Indeed, many of the associated musicians had recorded albums for a variety of labels in the years to come. About a year after the group’s demise, Taylor had signed a contract with Blue Note and was preparing to take the Unit to Europe to promote his album *Conquistador!*. Though Dixon performed on the record, he refused to join the tour because Taylor was breaking in the group at Slug’s Saloon, an East Village bar that had recently become a center of the new music. “I reminded him, ‘We decided that we weren’t going to be working in these clubs, man!’”<sup>196</sup>

Not everyone was as discriminating in their choice of opportunities, as Paul and Carla Bley, Mantler, Shepp, and Taylor all agreed to perform in early July at the 1965 Newport Jazz Festival, which was perhaps the biggest “establishment” gig in the business.<sup>197</sup> The exact details of how this engagement came about remain unknown,

<sup>191</sup> Carla Bley, telephone interview by the author.

<sup>192</sup> Trouchon, “John Tchicai.”

<sup>193</sup> Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 138.

<sup>194</sup> Dixon, interview by the author, August 16, 2006.

<sup>195</sup> Greene, telephone interview by the author; Bley and Lee, *Stopping Time*, 95.

<sup>196</sup> Dixon, interview by the author, August 16, 2006.

<sup>197</sup> “Newport Jazz Draws Small Crowd Again,” *New York Times*, July 3, 1965, 10.

but the producer of Newport, George Wein, probably contacted the musicians in April or May, when the Guild was close to falling apart. Wein admitted that he was ignorant of cutting-edge musicians, remarking at the end of 1965, "I knew nothing about the so-called new thing in jazz as of a year ago."<sup>198</sup> In his comments at the *Jazz* panel discussion on "Jazz and Revolutionary Black Nationalism," Wein referred to a "somebody" (or "this fellow") who had approached him about presenting the Guild at his festival, but specified that the only musician he called personally was Cecil Taylor.<sup>199</sup> At any rate, Dixon was furious that the concert was billed as a performance by the Jazz Composers Guild, and he notified Wein that this name could not be used. Wein replied that he had no idea that the organization had dissolved itself, which led Dixon to conclude that whoever initially spoke to the promoter had misrepresented their situation.<sup>200</sup> Along with Shepp's contract with Impulse!, this group engagement at Newport signaled the clear end of the Guild—in Mantler's words, "That, in the end, killed it."<sup>201</sup> Their final concert at the Contemporary Center had been held on April 18, and group had already been disintegrating.

Looking back on this period, Dixon describes one of his goals as having been to jostle the musicians of the experimental jazz underground out of thinking of themselves as "jazz musicians," a phrase that he draws out as if pronouncing the name of a nasty virus. In voicing this ambition, Dixon refers to what he regards as the demeaning practice of waiting for the same old gigs at the same old exploitative clubs and festivals. The Guild pursued the means to escape this situation on different fronts: by proving that their "difficult" music was commercially viable (remember, this was one of the primary lessons Dixon that sought to demonstrate with the October Revolution); and by insisting that this new music, like European American modernist music, needed to be subsidized in order to survive. Both positions were articulated at the time. In the *Jazz* panel discussion of December 1965, Shepp asserted, "Of course [Sinatra] made [money], and I would make it if you gave me the same publicity that you give to the Beatles and those people."<sup>202</sup> Just a year and a half later, however, Dixon wrote, "The jazz of the now, black, creative musicians, whether people wish to believe it or not, has broken its formerly very strict ties with the world and forms of American popular music."<sup>203</sup> The reality was that the New Thing, like mainstream jazz itself, did not enjoy anything like the popular following of rock 'n' roll, R&B, or soul, but it was also shut out of the patronage circles that supported other (white) avant-garde movements. The Guild's failure to completely break apart and reassemble some of these aging yet

<sup>198</sup> "Jazz and Revolutionary Black Nationalism," *Jazz*, June 1967, 30.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> Dixon, interview by the author, August 16, 2006; "Jazz and Revolutionary Black Nationalism," *Jazz*, May 1967, 38. Wein made a public apology to Dixon and offered to program him on the 1966 Newport festival, an offer that Dixon accepted.

<sup>201</sup> Mantler, telephone interview by the author. See also Young, *Dixonia*, 367, and the account of photographer John Hopkins in "AVANT GARDE: After the Revolution, Reaction Sets In," *Melody Maker*, July 24, 1965.

<sup>202</sup> "Jazz and Revolutionary Black Nationalism," *Jazz*, July 1967, 37.

<sup>203</sup> William R. Dixon, "Valuable but One-Sided Collection," review of Leonard Feather, *The Encyclopedia of Jazz in the Sixties*, in *Freedomways*, Summer 1967, 254–55.



powerful networks demonstrates that there were limits to how far their aesthetic incursions into the realm of high culture could be connected to the transformation of material institutions and practices. Despite the formidable obstacles the Guild faced, most cursory accounts conclude that the organization fell apart due to “racial tensions.” While this thesis is true to a large extent, I hope to have shown that by actually investigating these tensions, rather than bracketing them off as a supposedly self-evident explanation, we come to a greater understanding of the conditions under which these musicians worked, as well as the discursive tools they used to define themselves and their communities.

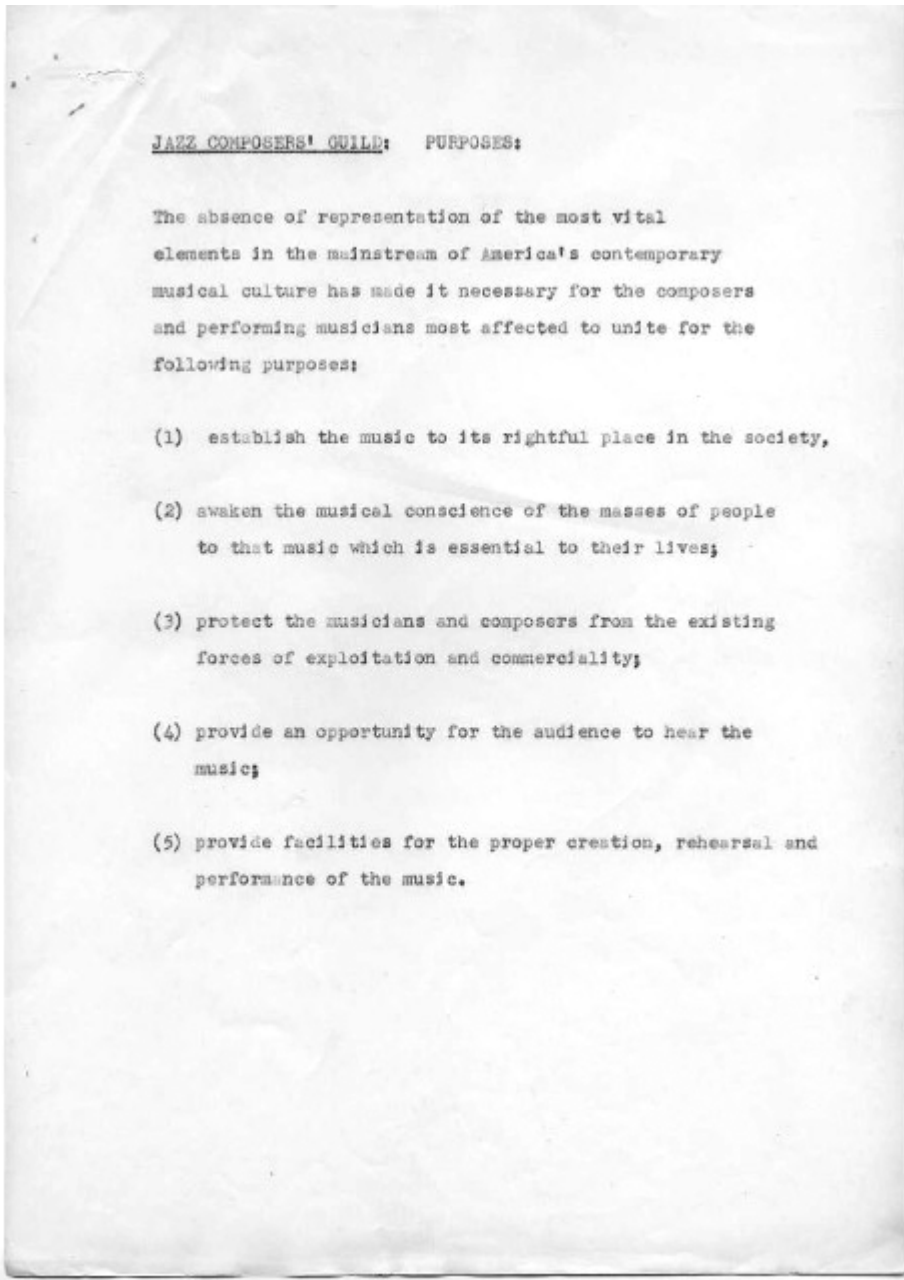
### **Acknowledgement**

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### **Abstract**

Following the success of his avant-garde festival, “The October Revolution in Jazz,” trumpeter and composer Bill Dixon founded the Jazz Composers Guild in the fall of 1964. The organization included Cecil Taylor, Sun Ra, Paul and Carla Bley, Archie Shepp, Roswell Rudd, Burton Greene, and John Tchicai, among others. One of the first significant attempts at self-determination by jazz musicians, the Guild sought to reorient the exploitative working conditions of the major clubs and record companies by producing its own concerts in venues across New York City. The Guild competed for leadership of the jazz underground with Amiri Baraka, the writer and critic associated with the Black Arts Movement, and with Bernard Stollman, a lawyer and owner of the free jazz record label ESP-Disk. The conflicts that arose between these three poles of organization, as well as within the Guild itself, were often the results of incompatible discourses of race. Critical race theorist Ruth Frankenberg's useful concepts of “power-evasiveness,” “color-evasiveness,” and “race-cognizance” are employed here as a means to help make sense of the different ideologies at work in the 1960s jazz avant garde.

Appendix



Jazz Composers Guild statement of purposes, likely dating from early 1965. Courtesy of John Tchicai.