

# The Golden Age of Non-Idiomatic Improvisation

FYS 129

David Keffer, Professor  
Dept. of Materials Science & Engineering  
The University of Tennessee  
Knoxville, TN 37996-2100  
dkeffer@utk.edu  
<http://clausius.engr.utk.edu/>

## Various Quotes

These slides contain a collection of some of the quotes largely from the musicians that are studied during the course.

The idea is to present “musicians in their own words”.

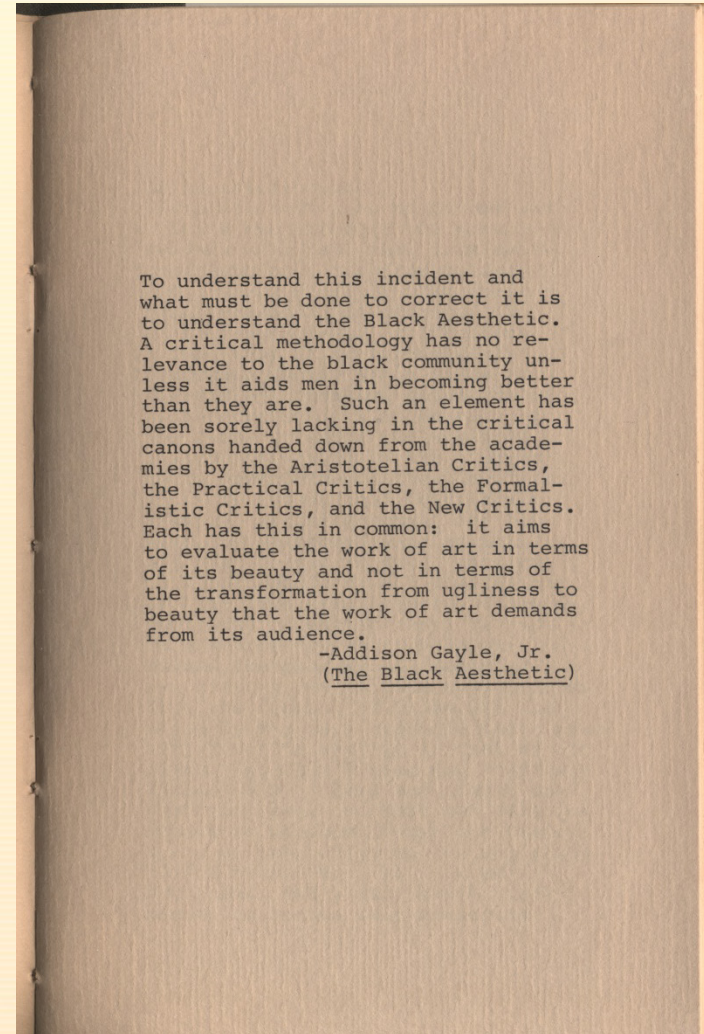
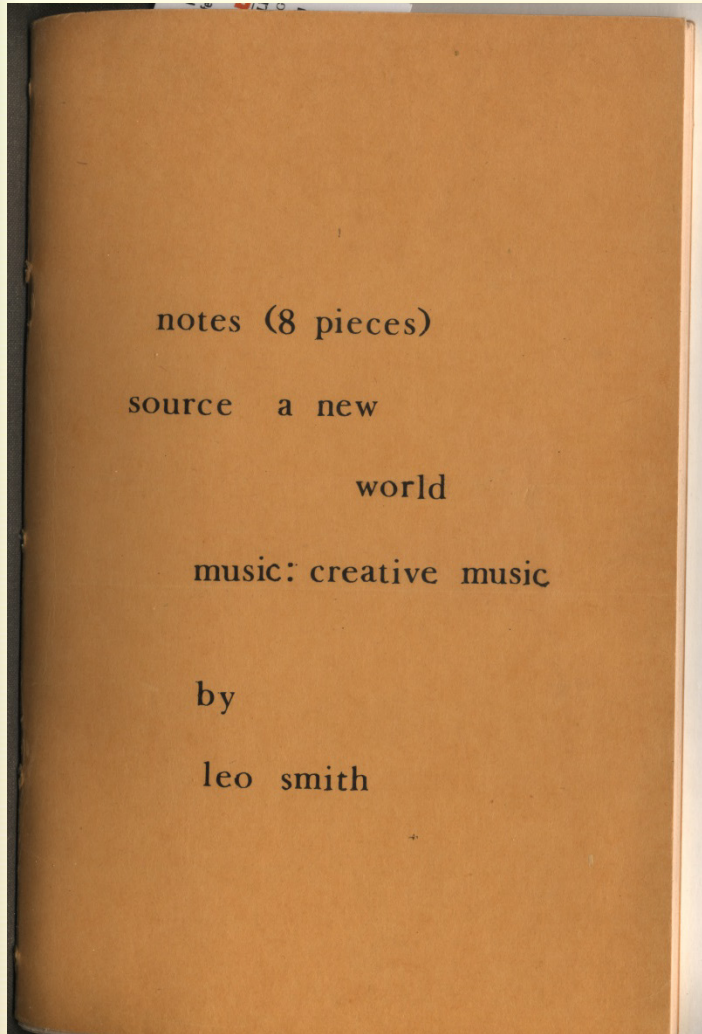
# Wadada Leo Smith



**American trumpeter & composer  
(December 18, 1941 - )**



## Smith on the Black Aesthetic



"Notes (8 Pieces) Source A New World Music: Creative Music by Leo Smith, self-published, Chicago, IL, 1973.)



## Smith's Notes on Creative Music (1973)

### CREATIVE MUSIC

in the art of music (rhythm-sound), there are but two types of disciplines; improvisation (improvisors) and composition (interpreters) --- improvisation means that the music is created at the moment it is performed, whether it is developing a given theme or is improvisation on a given rhythm or sound (structures) or, in the purest form, when the improviser creates without any of these conditions, but creates at that moment, through his or her wit and imagination, an arrangement of silence and sound and rhythm that has never before been heard and will never again be heard; composition means that the music must first be composed and then interpreted later, with the emphasis during performance being that it should sound the same (the mechanics of it) each time it is performed, as in euro-american music.

creative music is dedicated to developing a heightened awareness of improvisation as an art form - i feel that the creative music of afro-america, india, bali and pan-islam has done much along these lines, and is also creating a balance in the arena of world music (africa, asia, europe, euro-america, afro-america) and that this music will eventually eliminate the political dominance of euro-america in this world - when this is achieved, i feel that only then will we make meaningful political reforms in the world: culture being

the way of our lives; politics, the way our lives are handled.

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one must intelligently control his listening environment - that is, sound (music) must not whirl about the environment (listening area) without being examined thoroughly with all of one's faculties so that the principles involved in the improvisation or composition can become known, whether they are arrived at intellectually or intuitively - either process used for arriving at these principles brings the necessary understanding - the first element involving these principles is to know the architectural lay-out (sound-form) and how the moving about of the rhythm and sounds are evolving and how they are different at different levels of vibration (placement of sound and velocity of rhythm) and how the different characters of sound enter and leave the whole picture (audible sound and silence) - these are but the lowest level of principles and laws involving listening, for only after this information is known can one move to understand how these sounds intelligently affect his or her consciousness - it is then that one can begin to grow with the improvisation or composition, a process that continues forever.



## Smith's Notes on 'Nine Stones on Mountain' (1973)

the sound recording, creative music-1, is an example of my solo music. here the soloist is in reference to a multi-instrumentalist improviser. the sound recording has six improvisations all dealing with different principles or attitudes involving improvisation.

nine stones on a mountain can be explained physically and structurally

as an image-vision piece or mind-pattern piece in the sense of the separate sounds and entrances of instruments. consciously, what is here is a vision of how sound-thought permeates our mind. that is to say, each element in the piece is related in those kinds of ways, but are separate musical thoughts in relationship to my philosophy of sound-rhythm (see notes 1). the form is structured-open, and the events that occur singly or overlapping are termed color-modulations.

"Notes (8 Pieces) Source A  
New World Music: Creative  
Music by Leo Smith, self-  
published, Chicago, IL, 1973.)

## Smith's DREAMTIME (2008)

### Music

The politics of  
Destruction distortion in full glory unleashed a vast  
Wave of activity fill with repeating the repeated  
Uninscribed and uninspired music  
That was cultivated as art.

This brand new world has been  
Crystallizing for over 2000 years.  
And now, everyone can see or not  
See.

Everything  
That was the creative  
composer/improviser/performer  
World changed, by a force not glorified  
But globalized, captivated,  
Downloaded and listened to for a  
Few dollars or 2 cents per shot.  
Murdered.

Through the air an unknown voice  
Was heard. "There IS in the world  
An enclosed paradise known as  
The enchanted path of extraordinary journey  
Where artists transverse the plains in the  
Seasons of winter and summer  
And Dreams and visions fill up their hearts.

"The families move in  
This unseen society discovering and  
Constructing large multiunit musical instruments  
Community played , and they perform months long  
Musical ceremonies.  
The community are performers in the  
ensembles".

## Smith on the Search for Wisdom

LP: Was there a Mutual Search for Wisdom and Spirituality that came along with the music [of the AACM]?

WLS: Every meeting would include moments of meditation and silence. Every meeting. Everyone had a connection with a deeper meaning of what they were doing along with a deeper social meaning of what the collective meant and how important it was.



## Smith on a Personal Anecdote

LP: How did the Civil Rights movement personally affect you?

WLS: ...Now this is a personal story. One night while also in Mississippi, I was walking through town while taking my girlfriend home and a cop pulled up to us very fast and about six white guys jump out of the car to beat me up. And then one of the guys says, "That's Leo and he plays at the Country Club." They all jumped back into the car and took off. If I was Leo that didn't play at the Country Club, I may have been beaten worse or might have been killed.

LP: How old were you again?

WLS: That was fifty years ago when I was thirteen.

## Smith on the Source of his Inspiration

LP: Where does your inspiration come from or what influences your creativity?

WLS: Allah or God and I say that in the deepest meaning. I believe that the question itself is the manifestation of God or Allah. And this manifestation, no matter where it's going is that realization. And so, everything that I do, I attribute to this place.



## Smith on What He Is Trying To Do with his Music

LP: Can you describe what you are trying to do with your music today?

WLS: I'm trying to create a horizontal and vertical universe that is continuously evolving and has the same characteristics as the universe that I live in.

## Smith on What He Is Trying To Do with his Music

GF: What do you see is the relationship between spirituality and improvisation?

Smith: First of all, improvisation is an event that takes place in a specific zone or dimension, and that dimension is called the present. It's not like an edifice built on a mountain—it's a nonmaterial zone where inspiration is stored. When this inspiration flows, it creates a dynamic connection with a force or element that brings in the context of transformation. Improvisation, because it's done in the present, has already achieved this powerful element of transformation. Normally, most of our engagements are not necessarily done in the present, and if they are done in the present, there's no present awareness that it is the present.

The connection that improvisation has with spirituality is that both disciplines afford the notion of transformation.