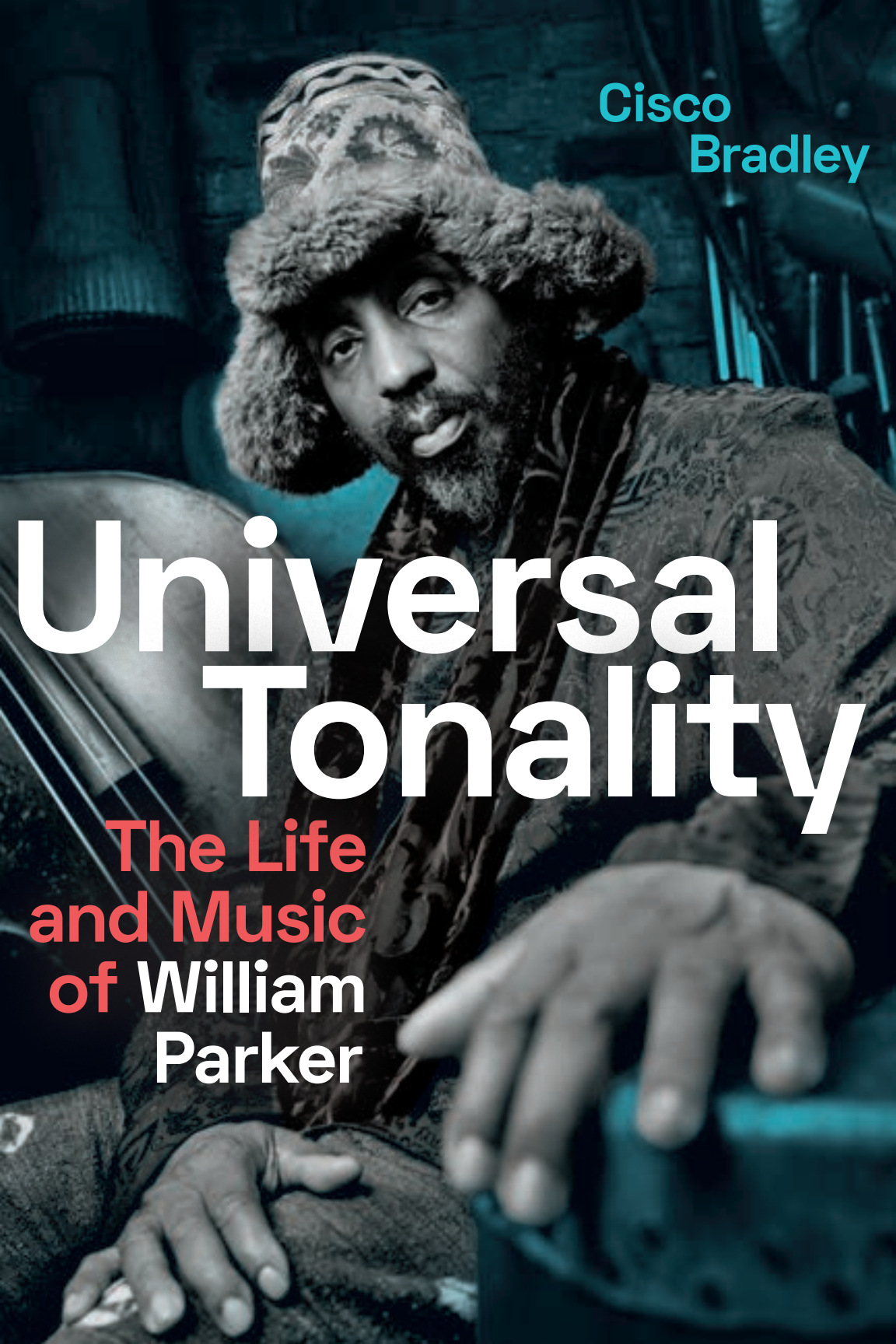
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Universal Tonality
The Life and Music of William Parker

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Cisco Bradley

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To my parents

SUSANNA LOUISE (REMPLE) BRADLEY (b. 1946), teacher, and
CHARLES CRANE BRADLEY JR. (b. 1944), pacifist and social worker,
who selected trombone for me to play in sixth grade,
which led me to jazz

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III. Toward the Universal

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I must thank the subject of this book, William Parker, for opening up his life to me. I first encountered Parker's music in 2006 when I was a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. I purchased a copy of his quartet record, *Sound Unity* (2004), at the Jazz Record Mart in Chicago. Upon first listening to it, I found that it opened up worlds of sound to me, and it sent me on a journey through his monumental work over the decade that followed. I never could have guessed upon first hearing his music that I would have the honor of later writing a book about his life and work. In 2011 I moved to Brooklyn to join the faculty at the Pratt Institute and began attending concerts around the city, first encountering Parker in a duo with tenor saxophonist Charles Gayle at the Clemente Soto Velez Cultural Center on January 2, 2012. Over the two years that followed, I saw him play in different formats many dozens of times, whenever the opportunity arose. Finally, on the day before Halloween in 2014, I approached Parker after a trio performance with Andrew Barker and Michael Foster at Iglesia de la Santa Cruz Church about an interview for my website, www.jazzrightnow.com. For that interview he talked about music as a healing force, while connecting it to an intricate cosmology of existence in such a way that left me transfixed. I realized then what a profound story Parker had to tell.

Just over a year later, on November 24, 2015, I sent Parker an email stating, "I find your work incredibly inspiring and I have been thinking about writing a longer piece on your life and work. What I was thinking is a biographical account that covers your evolution from your earliest years up to the present work you are doing, highlighting your major periods as an artist. Please let me know if you have any interest in this." Parker, who was on tour, replied later that same day: "This sounds interesting, I am in Europe. But let's stay in touch. I have some ideas." We finally found time to meet

in January 2016, and contrary to my assumption that it would take some time to get off of the ground, he made it clear that he wanted to move forward quickly and suggested weekly meetings "until we are finished." Over the succeeding three years we conducted twenty-one interviews, and he handed off old boxes of family papers, photos, writings, magazines, press clippings, memorabilia, and other ephemera for me to dig through. Parker's confidence and trust through this project have been one of the great honors of my life.

There are many people who have helped make this book happen. Parker's wife, dancer and arts organizer Patricia Nicholson Parker, and their daughter, Miriam Parker, both did extensive interviews that helped me understand Parker as a person, a husband, and a father, and how he had changed over the decades they had known him. Interviews with pianist Matthew Shipp and multi-instrumentalist Cooper-Moore were also essential. Many other people from the community of musicians also took time to do interviews, often extensive, and everyone I spoke to did it not out of obligation but out of a genuine respect for Parker. These people include Steve Swell, Leena Conquest, Andrew Cyrille, Milford Graves, Hamid Drake, Dave Sewelson, Dave Burrell, Jackson Krall, Jason Kao Hwang, Rob Brown, Joshua Abrams, William Hooker, James Brandon Lewis, Luke Stewart, and Steven Joerg.

A number of scholars deserve mention. Foremost among these is Rick Lopez, whose sessionography of Parker's work was invaluable to this book. It is no understatement to say that this book would have been nigh to impossible to write without him first blazing the trail. His tireless commitment to the intricate details of Parker's sessions (and those of a number of other musicians) has been monumental and has moved the whole field of study forward. Lisa Y. Henderson is another scholar worthy of great praise for her groundbreaking study of free Black communities in North Carolina, which opened the entire story of Parker's origins. After a phone call, she graciously sent me a copy of her hard-to-find master's thesis. In a related matter, thanks are due to Malinda Maynor Lowery and Warren Milteer, who both helped me navigate sources and literature on histories of Native Americans and free people of color in North Carolina. I also wish to thank Jeff Schwartz for supplying me with some obscure Albert Ayler references. Additionally, thanks are due to Ras Moshe Burnett, whose collection of free jazz in the period 1965–75 may be the most extensive anywhere.

There are a number of scholars, writers, and thinkers who provided me feedback that was immeasurably helpful. The three anonymous referees with Duke University Press gave me deep insights and helped me improve the

manuscript, its organization, and many of my arguments. I also received feedback on early drafts from three of my colleagues at the Pratt Institute: Macarena Gomez-Barris, Ann Holder, and Zhivka Valiavicharska. I also wish to thank Pratt for providing me with a sabbatical leave for the 2018–19 academic year, during which time I completed the manuscript.

Three other writers also provided me with notable feedback: Luke Stewart, Jordannah Elizabeth, and John Morrison. Luke is a rare combination of presenter, musician, and scholar, one who has exhibited a strong commitment to the furtherance of the music in the next generation. Jordannah and John are two of the cutting-edge thinkers on this music currently writing today. Jordannah founded the "Feminist Jazz Review" column on www.jazzrightnow.com, the first of its kind, and has written a number of groundbreaking reviews and conducted some key interviews with emerging and established artists. John brings a broad perspective and expertise on hip hop, jazz, and other forms of music that always seem to peel back layer after layer of understanding.

I wish to thank my high school band teacher, Michael Tentis, for opening the world of jazz to me. It has never left my ears. I wish to make a special thanks to my wife, Jennie Romer, a passionate human being dedicated to justice and decency, whose strength and determination is a constant source of inspiration. Finally, I wish to thank our daughter, Juliette, for reminding me what we live for. The world would be a different shade of color without her laughter, creativity, and daring.

"Flowers Grow in My Room": Realizing a Vision

All I have is my sincerity.
If you don't believe me, I have failed. — **William Parker**

On May 31, 1998, William Parker stepped onto the stage of an elegant Italian opera house at the Verona Jazz Festival for a highly anticipated performance. The Little Huey Creative Music Orchestra, his sixteen-piece big band, was with him, and this was their most high-profile performance to date. In fact, it was their first performance outside of New York City. Rumors of Parker's prowess had circulated around Europe since the 1980s, when he had visited regularly with the Cecil Taylor Unit, and Parker had also brought his own bands on tour when there were opportunities to do so. But at the Teatro Nuovo opera house in Verona on this day, Parker achieved what had seemed impossible: to bring his big band to a European festival.

For the performance in Verona, Parker had composed a suite of pieces titled *Mass for the Healing of the World*, a song for world peace. The opening part, "First Reading (Dawn Song)," began with low rumbling brass and bass that possessed a vocal quality of deep chant with sparse piano casting rays of light across the darkness of the other sounds. Tympani added an urgency to the music as the other members of the band began to coalesce and build toward a collective unity. Inside, Parker was bursting with ideas and mental

energy as the performance unfolded. His wife, dancer Patricia Nicholson, had choreographed the piece for the dancers who accompanied it, one of whom was their daughter Miriam. Parker later wrote that "all the players lifted up off of the bandstand and the dancers moved with grace and beauty throughout the space, what might be called clouds of sound filling with shape and deflating, bellowing and rocking, maintaining a sense of tension and release leading up to the Voice of dawn pushing and parting the river, how can it not sing. . . ."

The second part, "Hallelujah," unveiled the arc for the suite, in the form of an instrumental Black mass or shout service, which set up the subsequent parts.[1] As Parker wrote in his diary shortly after the event, chronicling his thoughts at the time,

> Hallelujah consequences the shifting of sound, everyone is blowing. Cooper-Moore is climbing as the road is laid down, we try to accompany the leaps across the stage, but where are we? Listen to Kono, each trombone sound circling the lifting of the legs and the little dramas and subtle poems that mirror drunk rain drops tilted and spread—really no need for metered time. We are now gone, we are stretching, and we have included a large chunk of music history all in one step. Triplets uneven though transcending notes to sounds, colors, dancing above all the lost yesterdays, here now gone. Three, four things happening at the same time, homage and reflection. Verona, Verona we are here. Trumpeter Richard Rodriguez comes down to the lobby of our Hotel and asks the receptionist "Where is the ghetto?" We are here, sizzling Verona. Love with all your heart, Romeo has gone full circle, this is now the house of the blues if only for a minute.[2]

Parker's performance in Verona catapulted him onto the world stage as one of the premier bassists, composers, and bandleaders of his generation. In the more than twenty years since, Parker has toured Europe multiple times each year and has performed in Africa, South America, the Middle East, and East Asia. Appearing on more than 150 records and having won prestigious awards, Parker is widely regarded as one of the most influential jazz artists of his generation.

Vision

Parker's journey to many of the world's premier jazz stages began from humble beginnings as a poor kid growing up in the South Bronx in the 1960s. In December 1967, when William Parker was fifteen, living with his parents

and older brother in the Claremont Housing Projects, he had a powerful vision that would define his life. He wrote about it in his diary:

> One day flowers began to grow in my room. Beautiful flowers, their petals were made from the poetry of life. Flowers made from music, dance, painting. Made of happy children who live in a place where there has never been or will there ever be war. A place where every human being is encouraged to shine as bright as possible and not be penalized for it. These flowers are made of the absence of famine and human brutality. I did not ask for these flowers, nor to my knowledge do I water or care for them. They continue to grow and I continue to pick them, they are changing my life.[3]

To Parker, the flowers represented creative talents that he had been granted, and he felt called to bring them out into the world and to share them with others. It took him years to nurture his talents to full fruition, to overcome poverty, and to build a community of like-minded artists, but this vision has guided him through his career.

Parker's vision came at a critical moment for him, when he was beginning to engage with the upheaval of the late 1960s. He had a deep longing for something that would connect him to a bigger world and explain the world that he saw decaying all around him. He found an answer in newly formulated, cutting-edge Black television programming that connected him to everything from political and social movements of the time to influential figures of the Black Arts movement such as Amiri Baraka, Larry Neal, Nikki Giovanni, and James Baldwin. Radio programs also brought Parker into contact with the new cultural attitudes of the civil rights and Black Power eras. These discoveries opened his mind to himself and to reimagining the world and his place in it.

Parker then threw open the doors to all kinds of groundbreaking art that was taking place in the late 1960s. Film entranced young Parker, and he consumed French New Wave, Ingmar Bergman, and avant-garde figures such as Stan Brakhage who opened his mind to worlds very different from his own experience. A self-study of film soon followed to the point where Parker considered making films of his own. But ultimately it was the musicians of the free jazz era, especially John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Albert Ayler, and Cecil Taylor, who were an intense source of light for Parker and sent him on a trajectory toward being a musician himself. Jazz poets such as Baraka, Joseph Jarman, and Archie Shepp were also some of the most powerful voices of the time to Parker. The death of Ayler, on the eve of Parker's first public performances, compelled him to commit to the music and

to "carry on the work."[4] The music was more than just sound to him; it was a spiritual journey toward salvation, truth, and human compassion, and it would set him on a quest that would define his life.

Parker entered the music scene at the age of nineteen in 1971, just as the loft scene in downtown Manhattan was exploding with activity. He frequented many of the key venues of the time such as Studio We, Studio Rivbea, Ali's Alley, and the Firehouse Theater. He quickly developed a reputation as one of the most talented young bassists on the scene and found gigs such that he was often playing five or more nights per week in his early years. Within a few years he established connections with Don Cherry, Billy Higgins, Sunny Murray, Milford Graves, Bill Dixon, and many others. Through early collaborations with dancer and choreographer Patricia Nicholson, he developed a growing body of compositions intended for groups ranging from solo projects to big band. In 1974 he got his first big break, playing with pianist Cecil Taylor at Carnegie Hall. Taylor had been left as the central free jazz figure in New York after the deaths of John Coltrane and Albert Ayler. Parker would go on to be Taylor's bass player from 1980 to 1991, playing extensively throughout North America, touring in Europe, and appearing on numerous high-profile recordings. Parker was able to form new associations with European players through his work as Taylor's sideperson, and these meetings fostered later collaborations and records. Parker's work with Taylor constituted some of the most important moments in Taylor's sixty-plus-year career and anointed Parker as one of the principal standard-bearers for the music in the next generation.

After leaving Taylor's band, Parker began leading his own projects more prominently by 1994, founding two key ensembles: In Order to Survive and the Little Huey Creative Music Orchestra, both of which recorded a series of groundbreaking records. In Order to Survive was a regular working band where Parker finally was able to refine and record his compositions, some of which he had been working on for more than two decades. The band also was the site of Parker's growing political consciousness through art that was intended to transform society around it. In Order to Survive's four records came to define the sound of the 1990s and reinvigorated free jazz as an art form. Little Huey Creative Music Orchestra emerged as the definitive big band of the era, expanding far beyond the work of Duke Ellington and Cecil Taylor. The band's seven records, released between 1994 and 2006, form a monumental body of work. Parker's big band was also the closest thing the New York scene had to a community band, giving young and emerging musicians a chance to prove themselves while firmly establishing Parker as the

leader of the community. Both bands propelled Parker onto the world stage as a composer, bandleader, and performer and established him as one of the most prominent figures in the second generation of free jazz musicians.

Then, in 2001, Parker released *O'Neal's Porch*, with a quartet that included trumpeter Lewis Barnes, saxophonist Rob Brown, and percussionist Hamid Drake, which marked a drive toward a more universal sound in his music. Other bands followed, including the Raining on the Moon Quintet, where they were joined by vocalist Leena Conquest. This work, in particular, drove Parker to develop his theory of universal tonality, that master musicians from any part of the world can meet and, without any preparation, play and communicate with one another in their own musical languages on a profound level. Parker's understanding of improvisation as the method for tapping into this deep and barely explored universal musical cosmos is the crowning achievement thus far in his long career. His work over the past two decades has explored this limitless realm and has left an unparalleled body of work that places the free jazz tradition at the head of the table of world music.

Parker also developed tribute projects to Curtis Mayfield and Duke Ellington, two artists he admired as a young man. The tribute to Mayfield was particularly crucial as it provided a propitious encounter between Parker and Amiri Baraka, a poet who had had a profound effect upon him as a young man. Baraka joined the band's world tour and fused some of the work from the last years of his life to one of Parker's most visionary projects. Both tribute projects also allowed Parker to pay homage to figures who had affected him deeply, both as an artist and a thinker. Parker established himself as a significant solo bassist as well, and in recent years he has composed extensively for vocalists and other formations. Parker's full body of work makes him a major contemporary composer, with more than four thousand individual works to date. Despite the fact that Parker has been prolific in documenting his own work, the vast majority of his compositions have yet to be recorded.

Challenges

At a young age, Parker developed a profound sense of himself and the world he inhabited. Born into poverty in the housing projects of the South Bronx, the son of African American migrants from the U.S. South, he fought against social stigmas that from an early age spoke loud and clear: you have no

value. In the face of that, he not only came to value his own talents, but over the years he also established himself as a visionary and daring artist. Despite Parker's immense accomplishments, he has never received the full attention of the jazz establishment press, nor has his work been the focus of any book-length work. This book is the first in-depth study of Parker's life and work, drawn from extensive interviews conducted with the artist as well as with his collaborators, friends, and family.

The lives of figures such as William Parker are often left untold for a number of reasons. First of all, the majority of jazz critics through the years have disregarded free jazz as an art form, writ large. Free jazz emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s as a movement in the music that would push back against the limits imposed by regular rhythms and tempos, chord changes, and tones of the bebop era; it aimed, in particular, toward creating something new. The music took many forms and soon became a nationwide and, indeed, a global phenomenon while evolving rapidly and embracing new influences, theories, formations, and instruments.

From its earliest beginnings largely up to the present time, a majority of the journalists writing on jazz have attacked the very legitimacy of free jazz, despite the fact that abstract visual art in the same time period was often heralded as genius.[5] Much of this hostility comes from a mischaracterization of free jazz as either outside of or adjunct to the "mainstream" jazz tradition. What is considered central and what is peripheral is, of course, a political decision, though one that has often had a catastrophic impact on the practitioners of free jazz. If one can imagine a large oak tree representing all of the different musics to emerge from or be inspired by jazz, many journalists and musicians have attempted to focus on only a few branches as legitimate while discounting others. Failing to see free jazz as an entity of its own or placing it outside of the historical trajectory of jazz cultural narratives has been a weapon that cultural conservatives have wielded against it since its inception.

The fact that free jazz was, especially in its early years, a revolutionary Black music also impacted how it was received. In its different forms, free jazz critiqued capitalism, racism, Western imperialism, Christian dogma, and consumerism. Many critics ignored its political affiliations or misconstrued them, and only a small number of Black critics, such as Amiri Baraka, praised the music and saw it as a key component in leading the community to a future society based upon revolutionary principles.[6] Yet free jazz constituted the biggest innovation in jazz since bebop in the 1940s. The lack of receptive cultural commentary has been matched by a silence or even disdain

among scholars as well. Even for many of the most profound musical figures of the generation prior to Parker, such as Cecil Taylor, Albert Ayler, Don Cherry, Muhal Richard Abrams, Bill Dixon, and Joseph Jarman, a pervasive silence still remains.

In the drive for inclusivity in the American cultural dialogue, antiestablishment, working-class Black artists calling for revolutionary change have often been cast out in favor of figures who integrated themselves into the cultural milieu less abrasively. Parker's body of work is a bold art of resistance, taking aim at many of the hallmarks of capitalism, modernism, pop culture, Eurocentrism, and materialism. But he has not stopped at critique; he has also contributed extensively to the process of memory making through his music and poems restoring, augmenting, or unearthing histories, biographies, and legacies of figures who range from world famous to unknown. Parker has striven to preserve the memories of members of the music community as well as build solidarity with oppressed peoples whose struggle he views as akin to his own.

Parker's success stands in direct challenge to the oft-repeated narrative of a working-class Black figure who "escaped the projects" to great success, allowing them to leave their old world behind. In contrast, Parker has been a community builder and a justice seeker throughout his life, believing his art and that of his collaborators to be imbued with transformative power to make the world a better place. Parker has never forgotten where he came from. His refusal to let others make a caricature of him and his fierce individuality that has stood in the way of commodifying his music have resulted in a dignified, monumental body of work. At an early age, Parker chose to stay true to his artistic vision and to shirk easy attention from critics or promoters. The years of struggle eventually paid off, but it was not an easy journey.

Parker is one of the most influential figures in the second generation of free jazz players. Born after World War II and entering the music scene in the 1970s, after some of the great figures such as Coltrane and Ayler were already dead, Parker picked up the mantle of the music and has carried it for nearly five decades. He has been a leader within this generation of musicians and has pushed far past the initial burst of free jazz in the 1960s. Parker's leading role in expanding and furthering the music has been monumental, even as music critics, record companies, and the jazz establishment worked to commercialize the music and place money and power behind increasingly conservative, less innovative artists and institutions.

Approaches

The context of Parker's music is embedded deep within his own identity and community, so this fact requires us to consider the historical roots of its formation to understand the work itself. Thus, this book tells Parker's story within the long arc of African American diaspora history, traced through his own ancestry. One major yet obvious obstacle in this endeavor is the silence that pervades the history of enslaved peoples and their descendants. Prior to emancipation, the paucity of perspectives from enslaved peoples and the lack of biographical details in the written record present a monumental challenge in telling that story without it being one that is merely seen through white eyes.[7] Recent scholarly work on the ethnicity of enslaved peoples in the Americas, oral histories of enslaved and indigenous peoples, and DNA evidence from Parker together help us form the early phases of the narrative told here. Resistance and the fight for dignity and sovereignty against hostile and violent power structures are the threads that run through these histories.

After emancipation, the written record changed considerably, but it still left out Black perspectives in bureaucratic documents that simultaneously served as mechanisms to categorize, divide, and control people of color. Erasure continued through many emancipated lives, such as Parker's great-grandfather, William "Bill" Parker (b. ca. 1850), who disappears from the record in Goldsboro, North Carolina, abruptly in the late 1870s. Was he lynched while still in his twenties as so many were after the collapse of Reconstruction? Did he die young because of accident, disease, or neglect? By 1880, there is no further trace of him in any record, although his two young orphaned sons remain. The disappearances of lives and the records of them are what scholar Christina Sharpe observes as the normatization of Black death in the historical record.[8] Sharpe argues that, in many ways, these "conditions of Black life as it is lived near death, as deathliness, in the wake of slavery," remain largely unchanged up to the present time.[9]

The strength of Parker's family, even after some migrated north in the 1930s, has preserved a greater visual and written record and is a testament to their efforts to tell their own stories. These records have survived only because the family maintained their own archives and passed them down through the generations, thus allowing us to illuminate lives that would have otherwise been obscured in the record. From that point forward, I weave the personal with the rich literary, artistic, and musical legacies of Harlem and the Bronx that gave birth to the subject of this book.

Parker's impeccable memory and storytelling ability, traits that everyone observes of him, make him the best source to speak of his own experience, and the twenty-one in-depth interviews that I conducted with him over the span of four years form the backbone of this book. Further interviews with Parker's family, close friends, associates, and students allow a multifaceted understanding of him as a person, thinker, artist, composer, performer, community leader, husband, father, and visionary.

Much of the second half of the book weaves together Parker's personal narratives with liner notes, previously published writings and interviews, and diaries to give a full picture of the artist. His liner notes, in particular, are revealing of his vision and motivations, although they have been almost entirely ignored by music critics over the years. The notes reveal a deep concern for history and memory, for the legacy of his elders and contemporaries, and for the political consciousness that has been the sustaining fuel for his long career. Parker's published writings open up lines for understanding his broader philosophy of music and art. And his diary entries unveil the intimate and enduring relationship he has had with the music and the community of practitioners.

Outline

Part I analyzes Parker's origins, early years, and key influences. Because Parker and his ancestors collectively survived the Middle Passage, slavery in the American South, the false promises of Reconstruction, and life in a northern ghetto, this book has as its starting point contemporary debates on what has been termed the "afterlife of slavery."[10] The threads of resistance passed down to him through action and word form a backdrop to his work as an artist.

Chapter 1 traces his family's origins from West Africa across the Atlantic via the slave trade to North Carolina and South Carolina. Employing a combination of DNA evidence, oral history, public records, letters, and family ephemera, we follow the story of his ancestors: enslaved and free Black peoples in the Carolinas who formed families with displaced Native Americans and poor white settlers on the frontier. The collapse of Reconstruction and the renewal of white supremacy in the South eventually pushed Parker's parents to migrate north to witness the 1930s Harlem Renaissance, where jazz was the cultural vanguard of the time.

Chapter 2 takes an intimate look at Parker's childhood in the Morrisania neighborhood of the South Bronx in the 1950s and 1960s prior to and during the economic collapse of the area and the rise of mass poverty and urban blight that swept through African American communities and neighborhoods. His home was a sanctuary filled with jazz that sparked the early phases of his imagination and creativity. His father's dream, for Parker to grow up to play in the Duke Ellington Orchestra, though unfulfilled, served to chart a path for young Parker as he navigated an alienating educational system, a rapidly deteriorating urban landscape, and the resulting poverty. In this environment, Parker found beauty, community, and fleeting moments of solace that allowed him to rise above despair.

Chapter 3 turns to the cultural, intellectual, and spiritual forces that transformed young Parker into an artist. By examining his coming of age in the era of the Black Power and the Black Arts movements, we see how his particular articulation of resistance to social marginalization and alienation manifested in an interest in avant-garde music and film. Via television and radio, Parker found the radical voices of his time who were speaking of Black liberation, art, aesthetics, and a revolutionary future society that would be founded on those principles. In his teenage years, poets were the truth tellers to Parker, and we examine some of the specific works that made a deep impact on him. His self-study of film was also foundational as he eventually moved toward music.

Part II examines the process by which Parker got his bearings on the music scene and how he built a reputation for himself prior to emerging as a bandleader in the 1990s. Parker paid his dues as a sideperson, playing with some of the most prominent figures of the time. Through these years of work, he refined his musicianship so that once the opportunity arose, he was ready to lead his own bands.

Chapter 4 analyzes his earliest professional work, primarily situated in Manhattan's loft scene of the 1970s. As a young musician, Parker was self-taught and learned a great deal on the bandstand while finding opportunities to play with many of the luminaries such as Cecil Taylor and Don Cherry while still in his early twenties. Work with the Music Ensemble, Jemeel Moondoc's Ensemble Muntu, Daniel Carter, and others allowed him to build a community of like-minded artists.

Chapter 5 follows Parker's professional collaborations with and eventual marriage to dancer Patricia Nicholson, their mutual interest in socially aware art, and their mutual struggle against the impoverished conditions

of the 1980s. Their collaborations formed the first workshop-type space for Parker to present his own compositions. Parker and Nicholson's relationship and financial struggle became the sustaining force that propelled Parker along in his early years as a musician.

Chapter 6 then turns to examine Parker's biggest break: being hired by pianist Cecil Taylor, with whom Parker worked continuously from 1980 to 1991. This period witnessed Parker gaining recognition as a sideperson, and he reached new audiences, especially in Europe. Forming associations with European players was key for the further development of Parker's music. Taylor was the closest thing Parker ever had to a consistent mentor, and he carried on much of the wisdom he gleaned from the experience into his own work that followed.

Part III focuses on Parker's work as a bandleader. Finally, from the 1990s onward, he found opportunities to lead and record his own bands with regularity. His compositions, some of which dated to the early 1970s, were finally brought to light, and he eventually formed ever-more-ambitious ensembles to showcase his work.

Chapter 7 examines Parker's most active band of the 1990s, In Order to Survive, and the social and artistic context from which it emerged. The band featured a shifting cast of musicians, including Cooper-Moore and Rob Brown, who faithfully assisted Parker in the realization of his work. Chapter 8 illustrates Parker's big-band work with the Little Huey Creative Music Orchestra and his theory of the Tone World. Little Huey has been, in many ways, his most personal and revealing work to date, and a springboard for his storytelling.

Chapter 9 then examines his work of the 2000s, the William Parker Quartet and the Raining on the Moon Quintet, which substantially built his global profile and his drive toward a universal sound. In particular, Parker's collaborations with Hamid Drake became the launching point for a whole range of music. His work with Leena Conquest constituted the first substantial work with a vocalist and set Parker on a new trajectory of composing lyrics in addition to the other aspects of the music.

Chapter 10 examines his tribute projects to Duke Ellington and Curtis Mayfield, his solo work, and a number of bands that are lesser known.

Chapter 11 discusses his most recent work. Having won awards and having played on so many great stages, Parker was finally able to release music in the 2010s that he had recorded as early as the 1970s. The final chapter also considers his legacy, drawn from interviews with his contemporaries,

collaborators, friends, and mentees, and his impact on the music and the community of artists who continue to play free jazz in New York City and beyond.

In articulating his own artistic vision, Parker wrote the following:

> It is the role of the artist to dance, sing, shout and whisper about all that is wonderful, beautiful and majestic. To mirror and project the present and future, to tell us the stories inside little children's hearts (giving us a view beyond the horizon). Communicating by the language of stone, wood, soil, the language of happiness, sadness and joy. It is the role of the artist to incite political, social and spiritual revolution. To awaken us from our sleep and never let us forget our obligations as human beings. To light the fire of human compassion. When this inner flame is burning, people are uplifted to another state, their vision and senses are doubled, they see, hear and feel things they never did before. The heat of the earth, the cry of living beings. This fire is stoked by conviction, caring, communication with others. The idea is to live strongly within this vision without compromises even after being met by a cold grey world that could care less about vision, a world that makes insensitivity and murder of idealism and individualism a standard. It is the role of the artist to become a human being to see that the only art is the art of living, the artist must quickly make the transformation to human being and in the same breath come to realize he or she is a vehicle through which light passes. We can flow and sing with this reality.[11]

Introduction: "Flowers Grow in My Room"

Epigraph: William Parker, liner notes, *Through the Acceptance of the Mystery Peace* (Centering Records, 1980).

1. William Parker, liner notes, *Mass for the Healing of the World* (Black Saint, 2003), [1].

2. William Parker, email to author, December 31, 2018.

3. William Parker, liner notes, *Flowers Grow in My Room* (Centering Records, 1994), [3].

4. William Parker, *Who Owns Music? Notes from a Spiritual Journey*, 2nd ed. (Köln: Herausgeberin, 2013), 92.

5. Take, for example, the work of abstract expressionist Jackson Pollock (1912–56), one of whose works graced the cover of the Ornette Coleman record that served as the namesake for the genre.

6. Amiri Baraka [LeRoi Jones], "The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)," in *The Black Aesthetic*, ed. Addison Gayle Jr. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 126.

7. Saidiya Hartman examines the erasure of histories of enslaved peoples in devastating detail and insight. Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

8. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 7.

9. Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 7–8.

10. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 6.

11. William Parker, "Introduction," *Bill Collector*, August 1984, n.p.

Chapter 1: Enslavement and Resistance

Epigraph: Sun Ra, "'The Visitation,'" in *Black Fire! An Anthology of Afro-American Writing*, ed. Larry Neal and LeRoi Jones (New York: William Morrow, 1968), 213.