

H That's too much to go into here, except to say that since her birth her mother was completely out of our lives until our daughter turned 18. So it was on me. I probably would've moved if I'd been alone, to better my fortunes and music and writing...but then again, I wonder. Even at my most intensely obsessed—which was certainly the default mode then for music and writing—the energy never seemed to be called into any very practical service.

M What do you mean?

H I never seemed to have much of a knack for coming across as anyone's hot property, except as my own. Other musicians, teachers, editors I wrote for, potential friends and allies, and employers in higher places...they all seemed to like my work just fine—often even to respect it a lot—and no one ever found me difficult to get along with...but, for whatever reason, I wasn't getting much of anywhere on any front. Always a steady trickle, enough, but never a swell or rush to any next level, not as a painter, musician, or writer, after trying everything I could for all those years.

So—to get back to the “oily daze” image. To my mind now, I was basically being oily then, in the sense that I was trying to lubricate, fit in—grease all the palms of the world in a bid for acceptance, approval, a place. I was in a daze, not yet awake to my own self and path, in that I was still thinking in terms of adjusting to the world...

M --as opposed to taking it by the horns.

H Exactly, and writing my own plans and scripts.

M Before we get to those, let's talk a bit about the music on *The Oily Daze*. To my ears, it's not exactly chopped liver.

H No no, I wouldn't call it that either. Speaking purely musically, it stands up fine for me too, and I'm sure it will always, after doing so for this long. But I took it as far as I could long before that gig, and was just not taking my proper next steps yet.

M Next steps musically?

H Look, I'd been listening to the best jazz—from Louis Armstrong and Fletcher Henderson up through Duke and Count Basie and Benny Goodman, then Dizzy, Monk, Bird, Miles, Trane...everyone—since age 13 or so. I went through everything in our local library, plus the more current stuff my jazz-buff dad bought. By age 16, I'd won a scholarship from *Down Beat* magazine to a summer session at the Berklee School of Music on the strength of my own compositions/arrangements, very Mingus-influenced charts, for small and big bands I'd put together to tape them, and play in concerts at my high school.

When I was there in Boston, I took classes in jazz theory and performance from people like John La Porta and Herb Pomeroy, sat in at clubs out on Revere Beach, heard a lot of great players come through the Jazz Workshop. That was 1965. I had the one Fake Book full of tunes we could buy underground then, learned hundreds of standards and jazz heads, practiced constantly...the whole nine yards. I prided myself on my mastery of such things.

At the same time, I was digging Ornette from his very first records, and then Cecil, and Sun Ra. I followed Coltrane into his wilds practically in real time, starting with *A Love Supreme* and then hanging on every other note live or on record as soon after it was sounded as was humanly possible. Pharoah, Rashid, Eric Dolphy, Albert Ayler; I saw them all as torchbearers of the tradition, not the nihilist anarchists others saw. I kept practicing my changes, as well as expanding into the new sounds and concepts going beyond them.

By 1967 & 8, I was living in San Francisco's Sunset District in a house with a couple of other musicians. One was a bassist named Joe Halpin, whom I'd met at Berklee. He was playing with pianist Denny Zeitlin's trio's regular weekly gig at a club in Sausalito, called the Trident. The drummer was Oliver Johnson, who went on to play with Steve Lacy for many years in Paris, and a little bit with Braxton, too.

Oliver brought me, Joe, and others then around to the home of Donald "Rafael" Garrett, who was like a central figure of the "out" scene, as we called it. He had moved out from Chicago, where he'd been involved somehow with Muhal Richard Abrams in the early days of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM). He had his own San-Fran version/vision of the same kind of community, which he called the Rafael Garrett Circus. His main instrument was bass; he would often play with Coltrane's bands when they came through. I remember him being on the LP *OM*. He played reeds, too, and I remember him ending up with Eric Dolphy's bass clarinet after Eric died in Berlin, somehow.

Anyway, my point with all that isn't to put myself in it—I was still pretty young, and just on the margins of most of it—but the point is that I was into the music in a serious, personal way from an early age, both its traditional roots and its then-current fruits. I never imagined, with that start, that I would find myself stuck in some two-bit Oregon college town for the next decade or two of the supposedly best years of my life going through the same robot drills—same changes, riffs, tempos, tunes, trading fours, all that lame routine—until I went senile and croaked.

M Why didn't you try to get something more interesting going for yourself before that? The Mike Heffley Circus...?

H I did try that, for those first few years I was playing there, mid-to-late-'70s. Little gestures, whenever I had the chance: some pickup bands I'd write original

music and poetry for, free improv, for artsy-funky venues other than the clubs. But I never managed to be any kind of major alternative presence, either. There really wasn't anything going on there like what Rafael and others had in SF. The main guy in town was alto saxophonist Sonny King, son of Saunders King, husband then of singer Nancy King. I was one of the younger players clustering around his open jam sessions and workshops in town...but it was all straight-ahead stuff.

Interestingly, though, there were also two guys from St. Louis who had been instrumental in the Black Artists Group (BAG) there: Malinké Elliott, a poet and playwright, and Arzinia Richardson, a bassist. They knew all the guys, from Ornette to the Art Ensemble of Chicago, AACM, BAG, Sun Ra, whoever; they'd bring them into town to play when possible, regularly over the years. They shared their knowledge and records and passion for the new music with me. My daughter and their kids all kind of grew up together around that common interest. Arzinia had a local college radio show to present anything he wanted to play, as did I after awhile.

Still, not even they managed to generate the kind of music we liked into the local jazz scene. The interest and audience just wasn't there for it.

M So you kept your bebop chops in shape.

H Well, yes—but now that you've got me remembering all this, the main thing I did was to start writing about the music, as a journalist. I decided that would be my personal contribution as a cultural activist for it; it was much more in line with my talents, interests, and temperament than to try and be some kind of community organizer, or even bandleader. I knew it all as a player from the inside out—in both meanings of that term that applied to the jazz discourse then. I was good at explaining intellectually complex and emotionally challenging concepts to the general, casual readers. I read most of the local journalism about jazz, especially the stuff called “new” or “avant-garde,” with total disdain. Benighted and shallow, like most of the national stuff I read, for that matter.

I gradually phased out the other kinds of journalism I was doing then and established a regular voice and presence as a serious jazz critic, reviewer, reporter, commentator in the major print outlets for both general and jazz-specific readers. My fantasy was that I'd wise enough people up to the value in the music I felt they were neglecting to create a local market for it that would sustain it—sustain me, then, as both musician and writer—and be one of the key loci on the more national and global networks it was creating.

M You were doing that kind of journalism from the late '70s to the late '80s. Did you see the kind of consciousness-raising you were aiming for over that time?

H I'd say it went pretty much like everything else: not at all the way I'd envisioned and hoped for, but surprisingly well in other ways. But those details would move us into the *Demos* CD...and you said you had some questions about the music on *Oily Daze*?

M Right...yeah, okay, let's just wrap that up by me giving my impression of the music and then asking you to comment on that. I'd also like to hear how you see it relating to the music that followed it, in real time and on record, either as a lead-in influence or as something you broke free of.

The first thing that struck me was the absence of drums. Piano, bass, and trombone is an unconventional trio mix for that mainstream jazz repertoire and genre. Then I noticed how virtuosic you each seemed. It wasn't like they were just comping and keeping time behind you; you had an ensemble style and presence that seemed more like three lead soloists working together than anything else.

Your trombone style caught my ear the most in that role, because it's common to hear pianists and bassists with a lot of command and facility; hearing a slide bone sound like a valve bone, so fluid and fast, is rarer. I'd really like to hear about your techniques for doing that. It reminded me of Miles' mix of vulnerability and cool...fluffed notes, a kind of bumptious tone and intonation, followed by total sophisticated command. Then, finally, your Bob Dorough-ish vocal style, serving lyrics equally idiosyncratic and engaging.

As for your playlist, it seems like a tasty mix of composers jazz cognoscenti would appreciate: some beloved Monk war horses ("Straight, No Chaser," "Blue Monk"), some real race horses (Miles' "Seven Steps to Heaven," "Hello, Young Lovers," "By Myself," all as fast as you could play them, it seems); some unknown but beautiful lyrical things, and some chestnuts by a few musicians' musicians (Clifford Brown's "Joy Spring" and Herbie Nichols' "House Party Starting").

All in all, I could see this being released and eminently marketable as is to the mainstream jazz market, with good packaging, publicity and promotion. Why was it not? Why not do it even now, as a part of your homegrown oeuvre here?

H I enjoyed the observant insights of your thumbnail sketch there, Yul Agee; they're pretty much the points I would want made about it all myself. Before I add to them, though, let me flesh out some of the aspects you touched on.

First, the bandmates. You're right, we were a trio of leaders, in our own little pond there. And the general consensus between us and many who heard us was that the music was of high enough quality to release. Like I said, even though I was kind of pegged as an outcat in my musical milieu there, I prided myself on my competence as a mainstream-trained player, of changes, rhythms, tempos and all that. So I did have a working relationship as a musician with most of the

players who were able to get the regular gigs I rarely could. When I did, and called them, they were happy to be associated with me and whatever I wanted to do. That I recall with warmth, and satisfaction, and respect and affection for them all.

The guys I played with here, for instance—pianist Matt Cooper and bassist Forrest Moyer—I'd played with for years, and had very good chemistry with. I could name others—guitarists Mike Denny and Richard Smith, pianist Barbara Dzuro, drummers Dennis Caffey and Alan Tarpinian, bassist Andre St. James, saxophonist Carl Woideck and many more...if you googled any of them now you'd probably find they've gone on to illustrious lives as teachers, scholars, and players of the music, just like I've gone on to my own more mature achievements. I'll come back to that social aspect of things when we get into *Demos*.

Second, the absence here of drums. I remember comparing that idea then in my own mind to the absence of a piano in Ornette's first quartets—his idea being to break out of the harmonic matrices caging melodic invention. My idea wasn't to break away from swing and pulse, and especially meter, at first, but that is what it led to soon after. Like many things, being a drumless trio was practical before conceptual. There was just no drummer available those nights, so we decided to do what we usually did with one without one. As we got into that, we started discovering the delights of it. As a trombonist, I was always fighting to be heard over everyone else. I know that sounds strange for a big horn like that, but I didn't like blowing it to its biggest bluster and bellow all the time; I wanted to play it softly, for nuances peculiar to it, but mostly when I tried to it just got buried. This was a chance to do that without undue hassle.

The first thing I noticed was the increased speed and fluidity we had, which was always an important payoff for me in the music, and one of the things I wanted the trombone to give more of. At that point, I wasn't thinking yet of freeing up the meter and opening up the rhythm all the way, but the door to that had been opened.

Third, the playlist. That touches back on the local community of musicians. The ones you mentioned as "unknown" were a tune called "Heather," by Matt Cooper, and "Nicole," by another Eugene pianist, Barbara Dzuro. We also played a thing called "Sorrow Catcher," by saxophonist Marty Ehrlich, who was an old friend of Malinke's, and came through Eugene off and on then. This was my short-lived attempt to collect original music from all my fellow local matadors and present my renditions of it on my own gigs. Before that, all of us typically did the usual standard tunes, interspersed with our own originals...but no one played each other's originals. I thought it might promote camaraderie, mutual support and interaction. It never really went anywhere, though.

As for Bob Dorough-ish, yes, I hear that too. I did like his style a lot, and took on some of it. It sounds a lot softer and wispier than I think I sing now—more too-

cutesy, too young. The lyrics I wrote to go with it do indeed, do go with it; other than that, I felt their interest to the local audiences would lie in the simple personalization, localization, if you will, of the tune and/or lyric we were each trying to make our own as we covered it anyway.

For example, all of us knew the story behind John Coltrane's "Naima," for instance, that it was written for his first wife, and that Jon Hendricks' original lyrics voiced that personal statement. For me to sing those lyrics feels too inappropriately personal, like making love to someone else's wife or something. That's not true of all original personal lyrics, of course, or even most—but some songs are just private prayers you shouldn't step in on.

However, writing a new set of lyrics that are personal to you in the same way the original ones were personal to the original composer sometimes feels okay to me. It becomes like an intimate conversation—with the original composer, in spirit, and with all those familiar with his or her music, in practice—without violations of privacy.

That pretty much explains all of the original lyrics I added to songs that had none, or that had some I preferred not to sing, or did prefer to add to for some reason. So I guess the way that part of the early music feeds into the later has to do with that whole issue of permissions and copyrights, which we'll get to.

M Right. Anything else?

H Just the little musical innovations we slipped in to spice things up away from the ruts we all knew so well. On "By Myself," each of us played a chorus or two out of meter and changes, improvising on it freely, a capella, all alone, then did a collective thing out that was consciously parallel more than interactive in concept. I did a kind of stand-up, prepared but also freestyling kind of poetic rap on the history of coffee, while Forrest improvised behind me. We brought in an anthropologist friend who worked a lot with Native Americans to play shakers and a frame drum with us on a long chant and jam on Jim Pepper's song "Witchi-Tai-Tai," based on his tribe's native music. I changed the lyric to the old Sinatra vehicle "Nancy of the Laughing Face" to be a tribute to our local jazz queen Nancy King. Things like that, along with some of the local-insider lyrics, just to bring it up out of the generic jazz gig it still had to be, for the most part.

M So all of that is pretty much the snapshot of where you were at just before it all changed dramatically.

H Exactly. I knew it was all over for me, in that incarnation. My daughter was getting old enough to live on her own soon, and I was done doing the labors of love for chump change. I quit hustling for the little peanut gigs and local story assignments, got myself a corporate job on the strength of my journalism degree and experience, doing technical writing for scientific trade magazines. Just stepped back, let the music and all things about it locally go on without me. I still

played, for myself, in private, and wrote, too, but started making conscious efforts to upgrade my freelance writing game from local to national.

M Before we leave that, what are your reasons for not wanting to greenlight my offer to make this CD available?

H Two things: the lyrics, and my relationship with the other two musicians and the musicians whose tunes we played. I mean, the music itself is good and interesting enough to have it be heard, in the kind of context you're setting—archival, historical, the early work of an artist for whoever's interested—not as a commercial product put out by a current working band. I wouldn't mind having it be up online with the others, if it could be free. But we'd have to pay to license all the tunes, even if we gave our tracks away. We'd have to try and get permissions for all the lyrics, and then pay extra to do all of those. We wouldn't be granted permissions for those that already had lyrics, and would surely have difficulties getting them for those that didn't, if we could get them at all. It's not worth it, for an academic kind of project like this.

Then too, all my old friends, whom I haven't seen or spoken with in years—Matt and Forrest, Barb Dzuro and Marty Ehrlich, for their tunes—they'd think I was crazy, treating this recording like something to be released. I'd be embarrassed, it would be too awkward to try and impart the concept to them.

Once we get everything in place as planned, a way might appear through all these problems of permissions, both formal-legal and informal-etiquette. It may eventually all fall into place so that I can put it all online for full commercial consumption, with all concerned parties getting all due credit and profits, in a way I'm not seeing yet. But for now, this is how it looks.

M Okay, back to your story.

H That break from the music scene, and the distance from the vestigially countercultural starving-artist-cum-housepainter scuffle generally, made me start to want an easier, pleasanter life, as a professional of some sort. That in turn made me start thinking about my music and writing more in that way than before, too. Two things happened, then, when I was settling well into my new job in publishing, and leaving the other stuff happily behind: Anthony Braxton and Antioch University.

I had a friend who was a real Braxton fan, and of the European improvisers he'd played a lot with. His huge collection of LPs put out by the European labels such as Free Music Production (FMP), Incus, Leo, hat hut and so on—and of all of Braxton's work—was the source of my first exposure to most of it. My friend introduced himself to Braxton on a visit to Mills College in Oakland, where Braxton taught then. He threw out the idea of bringing Braxton to Eugene, and Braxton expressed his interest and willingness to help make it happen.

I jumped on that idea with him, and into things I knew well and things I didn't know at all. What I knew well was putting together my own bands for local gigs, making press kits about them for the local media. I knew all the presenters and media people, as well as the best musicians, and had good relations with them. My friend got me on the phone with Braxton, and I explained that I was a big fan, a player myself, and a journalist who could be his contact person in Eugene for getting a real event off the ground.

Which gets us into the part I didn't know at all. I'd produced and promoted my own little things, but never anyone else's, let alone someone's of such stature. Braxton didn't have to know that, though. I just invited him to send me a list of his most ambitious and his bare-bones kind of situation, and told him I'd go for the most first, and see what happened. The most was basically a big band, to play his very challenging charts; the least was a solo alto sax concert, which was of course a staple in his own unique performance work.

In the end, we did two big band—or “Northwest Creative Orchestra”—concerts, one at the University of Oregon School of Music, the other at Lewis & Clark College in Portland. We also did a solo alto concert at Oregon State University, and some workshops for students in both Eugene and Portland. The Eugene concert, the first one, was the one we released on Black Saint, in 1991, and got five stars in *Down Beat*.

This was the new terrain for me—colleges, rather than clubs or other commercial venues. Their doors opened for me so easily because so many of these musicians I had played with for going on two decades there in Eugene had become teachers in the Oregon colleges and universities. I had written local stories about and reviews of all of them, had used them on my gigs; that, combined with the cachet of Braxton's name, was more than enough to get me into the offices of the department heads and deans with sterling recommendations, and get their funds and other kinds of support.

This seemed the new way for me to go. It got me into the whole world of nonprofits, starting with the music schools themselves, then the various arts councils and commissions they got funds from. I started thinking of the NCO as an ongoing institution, like the Eugene Symphony, or Opera, with a season of events and subscribers, grants, a budget, and so on. It would repeat the Braxton formula: commission new work by international heavyweights to present in collaborations of them and the best local players. It would give the music its due, culturally—something like Wynton Marsalis et al saw Jazz at Lincoln Center doing for his music of choice—move it from the scuffling margins to the cultural center. It would give the composers a chance to present their work in that context, in a local scene eager to honor them; and it would show off the prowess and talent pool of that local scene. Hopefully, it would also provide me with the kind of middle-class, comfortable professional life I was yearning for.

M What about your corporate job?

H Well, I did all this on my own time. This was 1988-89...a period of a few months...and sometime in there, I was leafing through the back pages of the *Utne Reader* and came across a classified ad for a Master's degree program at Antioch University. It was designed for professionals who had been working in their field for 10 or more years, such that students could design their own curriculum—practica, internships, coursework in their locales, etc.—around their working schedule.

I saw it as a way to launch and support the NCO, by designing myself a double major in Music and Arts Administration. Braxton, who had just started working at Wesleyan and was chairing the Music Department, signed on as my Degree Committee Chairman; Bernard Dobroski, who had just moved from his position as UO School of Music dean to the same position at Northwestern University, signed on as my other major committee member. All my music projects, plus some writing projects, would be graded as class projects, to put it simply; my incorporation of the NCO under the d.b.a. rubric of Pacific Rim Players set me up as an arts administrator, the general manager of a 501c3 that could get grants for its mission. I also took a bloc of regular graduate-level courses in Arts Administration, at the U of O.

After a year or so, this whole ballgame did crowd out my corporate job, but I felt I was moving up rather than falling back into something. From 1990-93, I was getting my Master's Degree by growing the NCO; playing much more, and much hipper, music; taking courses I loved; doing all the class-framed writing projects that would add up to my thesis and first book; working as an intern for the UO School of Music, the Lane Arts Council, the Oregon Arts Commission, and Eugene's big Hult Center for the Performing Arts, where I started working as a staff writer after the internship.

The Hult was also a much hipper, and more suitable place to work, for me. I wrote up all the different big-name and up-and-coming artists that came through on the national circuit.

M I'm most interested in the "growing the NCO" part. The list of people you brought in after Braxton in that short time was pretty impressive: Andrew Hill, Oliver Lake, Vinny Golia, John Carter, Julius Hemphill, Leroy Jenkins, Steve Lacy, Ursula Oppens, Marty Ehrlich, Tim Berne, Jay Hoggard, Pheeroan ak-Laff, Mark Helias--

H Right, all that—but I have to stop you and clarify a few things. John Carter and Julius Hemphill were both alive when we started out, and were starting to talk and work with us on their projects. Both died during that process, and we went ahead and did tribute concerts of their music. All those names you mentioned from Ursula Oppens on were for the Julius Hemphill tribute, one concert, and it took place in 1995, I think, at Wesleyan University, even though it was originally slated for Oregon. Since it was mostly funded by an NEA grant, we were able to make that change without losing the funding. Leroy and Steve Lacy

were brought in by some other presenters, in Portland; I just used our group to sponsor an appearance by each down in Eugene. But yeah, Andrew, Oliver, and Vinny were all our guest celebrities, in the same way Braxton was.

M This brings us to *Demos*, which includes tracks of excerpts from all those concerts. Again, I question why you won't or can't put that up online for free access? Even more to the point here, why weren't any or all of them not released as major commercial CDs, as was the first one with Braxton?

H That's certainly caused me much more frustration over the years than *The Oily Daze* (which I never even thought about as releasable until you brought it up). Braxton was my first experience of that sort, and I just assumed everyone would do what he did—take the professional recording I made of everything, edit it down to taste, and put it out as their latest CD on their usual label. That's how I thought the NCO would grow internationally as it grew locally.

The reasons it didn't happen that way varied in each case. The recordings I made and edited for myself added up to 2-CD sets of the Andrew Hill and Vinnie Golia concerts, and the Julius Hemphill tribute concert; and single CDs of the Oliver Lake concert and the John Carter tribute. All stand up well next to the Braxton CD—though I do think that was the best one, due mostly to the energy and thought Anthony put into presenting his own music, and the extensive rehearsals we were able to have because he sent his scores ahead of him. The others were all a little rougher and looser, reflecting especially the lack of that kind of preparation and organization—but they were still far from chopped liver. I'd say they all had in common a real showing of some great music by some great composers, including some charts by NCO people, for the John Carter tribute; and some equally great playing by great players, both my bandmates and our more famous guests. They were all eminently releasable, and some just as likely to get five stars from *Down Beat* too, depending on the reviewer.

None of the other guests seemed interested in it. Andrew didn't bring it up at all; I supplied him with the master as well as my edited version, and offered to work up any other version he might have preferred. Never heard back about it. I certainly wasn't going to badger him about it. Vinnie offered to release his on his *Nine Winds* label, but I would have had to pay him to do that, as his other artists did, I guess—I recall \$4000 being mentioned—and I didn't have it, and never got around to beating the bushes for a grant for it. Marty Ehrlich, who was handling Julius' material, decidedly didn't want the concert released, probably for very good reasons for him and the rest of that all-star band that had nothing to do with me or my desires; and Oliver might have okayed a release if I'd presented him with a good situation...but he didn't initiate anything.

In short, if anything like what Anthony Braxton did with that first recording was going to happen with the others, it was going to happen on my initiative, which I wasn't as well positioned or inclined as the principal artists themselves were, or needed to be, for it to happen the same way, as it should have. Even the one CD

that was the NCO's own—the John Carter tribute, in which NCO people who had played with Carter, and a few who hadn't, wrote original charts for the band—generated no interest among those members or the rest of the band as something they wanted to help me release somehow.

M I'm surprised that in the age of Napster and other such operations these recordings aren't just out there somewhere as bootlegs, multiplying like viruses.

H Well, they were all done before the rise of the internet. I'm the only one who has them all, as far as I know, and I haven't gone that route with them even in my moments of strongest wishing that they could be heard. They're probably also all archived in the separate colleges and performing arts venues where they happened, forgotten on the shelves. I tried at one point to get the University of Kansas to archive them all under their Territorial Bands rubric, with the help of Kevin Whitehead there...but that went nowhere, again, because of the questionable copyright and permissions issues.

To wrap the whole NCO part of the discussion up, I look back on it as one fork in my road that I started to go down before the other fork presented me with some offers I couldn't refuse. It was my bid to plant my flag in dead seriousness in the place where I lived, to make the kind of luck and life for myself I saw in potential. If I had stayed with it, I surely would have given it all I had, and grown it into the local and global force it clearly promised to be. It would have been a good and worthy road to go down, and I'm happy and proud to have had the run that I did have down its first few feet, so to speak. We lasted for three or four years, I got most every grant I applied for, started getting into the big NEA money toward the end...made dynamite music with stellar people, and left behind one stellar CD.

However, by the end of my Master's program, I had landed a book contract from Greenwood Press to do a major monograph about Braxton's music...and was invited by him to enter Wesleyan University's PhD program in Ethnomusicology, tuition-free, under his sponsorship. So long, Eugene, Oregon...