

William Hooker - "Giving Black" / "Crossing Points".

Prelude –

I am proud of being asked to participate in this conference. I graduated from Central with a degree in Political Science and Sociology. I am a drummer, composer and poet brought up in New Britain. I attended a black church in town while performing with a local rock group. I then ventured into playing what was called "rhythm and blues." Let's get into this for a moment to discuss Rock and Roll and Funk.

I started playing this music when I was about sixteen. If you go to New Britain's Broad Street, you will see a place called the Falcon Hall. There were lots of dances there and the music reigned. I played this music through high school. As I began to study for my degree, knowledge of the music accumulated. Then the riots hit following the Rodney King verdict. I performed in Bridgeport, New Haven, Springfield, Hartford, Stamford, and other places to document the self-destructive reaction of the black communities I academically analyzed. I then turned to "classic jazz" and organ trios which morphed into a love for the "avant-garde" and more exploratory forms of music.

I went to California, living in San Francisco and Oakland where I encountered my "Earth Mother" while playing in a group with three conga drummers. After investigating the rhythms of Africa music. I returned to the East Coast – a different person, ready for NYC and its challenges. This was my "Crossing Point". This was the juncture (in my going from the East Coast to the Bay Area) that provided me with a new outlook and the strength to decide that I would not play anyone else's music but my own. I began writing and transcribing, but it should not be forgotten that this music supplied me with money to go to Central and pay for tuition and books.

I think my understanding of the relationship of this music to the African diaspora came later in my life where I explored the rhythms and the many forms of percussion that have been given to the world through the culture.

This was one of my "Crossing Points."

It is a received truth that people singing supplied the roots for much of contemporary music. The church and its ritualistic manner made it a very common way to bring unity and peace to masses of folks that need a common purpose. The words

“His eye is on the sparrow – and I know he watches me”

And

“Blessed assurance – Jesus is mine “

create a feeling of solidarity like no other social or musical force. This is all a part of African truths about existence and well-being which were transferred to the populace of the African American community. This is now a world-wide force...as exhibited by the words -

**“this is my story , this is my song
praising my savior - all the day long.”**

All day ...

Spirit and ritual are very important parts of the truths we are speaking of.

There are so many gospel singers of note that I can only share a small group of those I have found inspiring. The tenor and aspirational nature of this music resounds in the hearts and souls of the black populace wherever we are found – whether it is liked or despised. Some of those I listened to include James Cleveland; The Soul Stirrers; Mahalia Jackson; The Clark Sisters; Thomas Dorsey; Clara Ward and the Dixie Hummingbirds. These are some of gospel’s forerunners that have been overlooked from the modern canon of gospel music.

Through the dance tunes, religious music, and the work songs of African Americans, we tap into the rich music of the African descendants that is a part of the foundation of our artistic history. Some of the essential music techniques we employ today are a part of our musical expression and are still prominent in hip hop, jazz, and sacred musical traditions. To this end I will refer to a musical form called “call and response” – one of many – that harkens to a form of interaction between a speaker and an audience in which the speakers statements (calls) are punctuated by responses from the listeners. In some African culture, this is a pattern of democratic participation. This is used – with great effect – in music in multiple forms like gospel, rhythm and blues, jazz and hip-hop. Let’s begin by saying it is important for all students (especially African American students) and “seekers of truth” to acknowledge the history of our music and our

“groove.” Our contributions are at the foundations of many international cultures and peoples – never forget that.

***Let’s stop here and speak about the Blues.**

In the past - As the music derived from the slave/field culture of the African-Americans; shouts and hollers made their way into work songs.

These representatives became “blues” and jazz musics. It should be noted that after Emancipation, blacks had the leisure of being alone and thinking for themselves. This presented a problem because (among others) the issues of wealth and hostility came to the fore. It was in this context that “classic” blues and ragtime were introduced and grew. I then turned to “classic jazz” and organ trios which morphed into a love for the “avant-garde” and more exploratory forms of music.

However, those that were creators of the original forms remained outside the popular culture of America.

As we moved from the South to the North – the “race record” was created but much later our music would become mainstream in

I want to reference the drum, which is an essential artifact in the retelling of this story, because it carries tradition in jazz, the civil rights dialogues and the new music which is beyond category in 21st century America.

The deep well of black musical tradition keeps evolving and it is in this tradition that a brief summation of this knowledge will be addressed.

Here are a few of my shared Reflections on this subject. I encourage you to make notes of these for your own knowledge and future joy.

What comes to mind are the works of Art Blakey (and his record – “Indestructible”); Milford Graves (and his recording – “Meditations Among Us”); Sonny Murray’s “An Even Break (Never Give A Sucker);

Olatunji and his recording (Drums of Passion). These are signposts to another consciousness and awareness. I hope you will explore these artful “efforts” to enliven your thoughts.

Another Reflection is from the perspective of the historical written documents that address the music.

I want to provide substantial references to the books “Black Music” (by Amiri Baraka), “Notes and Tones” (by Arthur Taylor), “Jazz People”(by Valerie Wilmer)

And works by The Black Rock Coalition / New York, Arts for Art (in the

form of concerts and presentations) in the U.S. – and finally – the AACM (an organization located in Chicago and NY).

In preparation for this event – I opened a classic book I own entitled “The Vibe History of Hip Hop.” My first page I opened to was one with a big picture of the group “De La Soul” – it was at that opening that I realized I cannot say that I understand the many twists and turns found in this musical expression. I CAN SAY – I know this is a world-wide phenomenon and deserves respect. All of YOU (probably) know more about this genre than I could ever impart. So – just out of common courtesy and respect, I will not elaborate on this genre.

Conclusion ...

I am leaving the beautiful work done in the realms of Hip-Hop and rock and roll for another time. I hope we can revisit these soon because I do not have the platform to give you all my “multi-faceted” outlooks.

I trust you will investigate the references I have supplied you with and will continue to support LIVE events and LIVING creative artists.

Thank you.