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Bill Dixon's Voice (Letter)

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Abstract

In November 1966 composer and improviser Bill Dixon recorded a seventeen-minute-long "voice letter" to jazz writer Frank Kofsky. This letter may be analyzed as a critical intervention by Dixon, an attempt to change the context of interpretation around improvised music. But the voice letter may also be heard and analyzed as a kind of performance. As Dixon speaks, one can hear the rumbling and roar of the city as well as the staccato sounds of car and truck horns unfolding in dynamic counterpoint to his words. In this essay, I put the voice letter into dialogue with Dixon's personal history, his writings and interview statements, and some of his contemporaneous musical and multi-generic projects, especially his collaboration with dancer and choreographer Judith Dunn. I show how the letter maps Dixon's and Dunn's positions within a geography of intellectual circles, experimental artistic communities, and low-wage employment networks. By extension, I examine how the voice letter, as critical intervention and performance, points us to a nuanced understanding of black experimental music of the 1960s as a socially inflected, self-conscious and, ultimately, serious engagement with various modes of artistic production and thought, carried out under conditions of both precarity and inspiration.

> Letter to Frank Kofsky: Dear Frank, I got your short note and the photographs, and they were very good. You said something about having even better ones, and if you can bear to part with those or at least the negatives so we can have some prints made up, I'd deeply appreciate it. We've been pretty busy here, Judy and myself, working as usual. We did a concert at Hunter College, which was very well received. And, the performance was very good, and the material was very good. I find that looking for an apartment, trying to stay alive, trying to do my music, has almost made it impossible for me to write letters. That's why I'm sending you this tape.[1]

So begins a November 1966, seventeen-and-a-half-minute-long "voice letter" from the composer, trumpeter, painter, theorist, and educator Bill Dixon (1925–2010), who is best known in jazz history for establishing the Jazz Composers Guild.[2] The Guild was a short-lived, multiracial musicians' cooperative formed following the October Revolution in Jazz concerts and panel discussions Dixon produced at New York's Cellar Café in 1964. With members such as Archie Shepp, Cecil Taylor, Sun Ra, Carla and Paul Bley, Burton Greene, and John Tchicai, the Guild was constituted by practitioners of "The New Thing"—that is, experimental, improvised music generally understood as "jazz."

The author wishes to thank Joan Bailey for her assistance with the Kofsky collection as well as Benjamin Piekut, Andrew Raffo Dewar, and an anonymous *JSAM* reader for their review of and comments on this essay. Any errors of fact or judgment are entirely my own doing.

[1] "Voice Letter from Bill Dixon to Frank Kofsky" (undated), Frank Kofsky Audio & Photo Collection of the Jazz and Rock Movement (A Gift of Bonnie Kofsky), UC Santa Cruz, McHenry Library, Special Collections. Transcription by author. Quoted by permission of the William Robert Dixon Living Trust.

[2] Two comments in the letter indicate that it was recorded in November 1966. Dixon says that he and Judith Dunn had worked "together for a year now," and various sources show that their collaboration began in late 1965. Later, Dixon describes the Hunter College concert, which occurred on 2 November 1966, as happening "the other day." See Ben Young, *Dixonia: A Bio-Discography of Bill Dixon* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 88–89, for the date of the concert.

"Judy" is the dancer and choreographer Judith Dunn (1933–83), with whom Dixon began a creative and romantic collaboration in New York in late 1965 that lasted through 1972. Dunn was a veteran of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, which she joined in 1958. She embraced the choreographer's efforts—developed in dialogue with his collaborator and partner John Cage—to bring chance operations and indeterminacy into the creation of dance pieces. In July 1962, shortly before leaving Cunningham's group, she helped found the Judson Dance Workshop with her then husband, Robert Ellis Dunn, and other Cunningham alumni. The voice letter was likely made at Dunn's loft at 1024 Sixth Ave. (near 38th Street) in New York's Garment District.

The letter's recipient, Frank Kofsky (1935–97), was the Marxist jazz critic and author of the 1970 book *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music*.[3] Dixon's letter was a response to Kofsky's gift of photographs, presumably of Dixon, and inquiry about interviewing and writing about him. That summer and fall, Kofsky, who was then writing for *Jazz* magazine and pursuing a Ph.D. in history at the University of Pittsburgh, interviewed about two dozen experimental musicians (mostly African American) as part of the research for the *Black Nationalism* book. The voice letter and recordings of these interviews currently reside in an archive of Kofsky's materials at the University of California, Santa Cruz.[4]

Dixon's voice letter focuses on his and Dunn's commitment to making original art and the difficulty of earning a living doing it. The voice letter may thus be analyzed, alongside Dixon's contemporaneous writings, comments in interviews, and activism with the Jazz Composers Guild, as an intervention: an attempt to change the context of interpretation around improvised art and, by extension, to better the conditions under which its practitioners labored. One goal of this essay, then, is to use the voice letter as a window onto the contours of Dixon's thought at this moment, showing his nuanced take on the political economy and racial politics of the jazz and experimental art worlds. By so doing I hope to join the conversation about this important musician and theorist while extending my own project of mining the insights of black musician–intellectuals and exploring their dialogues with others to understand better the relationship of music to the social and the politics of "jazz" as art form, commodity, and discourse.[5]

[3] Frank Kofsky, *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970).

[4] The Kofsky collection includes twenty interviews from the summer of 1966, in which twenty-two musicians appear. They are, in chronological order, with Charles Moore, Joseph Jarman, Ron Carter (and an unidentified musician who joins the conversation), Wayne Shorter, Tony Williams, Marion Brown, Don Cherry, Sun Ra, Roswell Rudd, Joe Henderson, Frank Smith, David Izenson, Giuseppe Logan, Cecil Taylor, Rashied Ali, McCoy Tyner, John Coltrane, Grachan Moncur III, Pharoah Sanders and, in a joint conversation, Ric Colbeck and Mark Levin. Most of these interviews remain unpublished. The interview with Coltrane appeared in *Jazz* in September 1967 and again in *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music*. The interview with Rudd was published as Frank Kofsky, "A New World Music? An Interview with Roswell Rudd," *American Dialog* (Spring 1967): 33–36. The McCoy Tyner interview from the *Black Nationalism* book appears to have been done along with the others, but the recording is not in the archive. For more on the collection, see http://news.ucsc.edu/2007/11/1744.html.

[5] My contributions to this multifaceted conversation include *What Is This Thing Called Jazz? African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); "Jeanne Lee's Voice," *Critical Studies in Improvisation/Études Critiques en Improvisation* 2/1

This essay builds on but diverges somewhat from recent scholarship on Dixon focused more on his music (that of Andrew Raffo Dewar) and his role in the Jazz Composers Guild (that of Benjamin Piekut). A related contribution is to shift the conversation about Dixon away from the Guild and Dixon's well-regarded music of the 1970s and beyond and draw attention to his collaboration with Dunn and to the 1966–67 recording *Intents and Purposes* that emerged from their partnership. This collaboration has been largely unaddressed in accounts of Dixon by jazz studies scholars, although dance studies scholars, most notably Danielle Goldman, have examined it.[6] Although space does not permit a full treatment of Dunn and her work, I try to convey a sense of the depth of their mutually generative creative and intellectual relationship.

Using the voice letter to develop a different take on Dixon would be incomplete, however, without also paying attention to the sound of the recording. I conclude my discussion of Dixon's critical intervention in the letter by analyzing both the sound of his voice and the ambient sounds of New York City captured on tape. Although I have found no evidence that Dixon intended the voice letter to be heard as performance, the sonic qualities of the recording, Dixon's contemporaneous approaches to both solo and collaborative music, and insights from sound studies and jazz studies scholars suggest that the voice letter may be heard as both a solo, primarily vocal performance *and* as a collaborative performance between Dixon's voice and the sounds of the city. Such an approach enables a better understanding of how Dixon's black musical experimentalism, his ongoing collaborations with Dunn, and his public cultural critique were enabled by but also defied the expectations of art world gatekeepers, liberal and radical jazz writers, and black-nationalist cultural critics alike. Through its performative modes, the letter also speaks quite articulately of the joys and social urgency of making black experimental music and collaborative, multi-generic expression while also narrating the precariousness of doing these things in New York at that moment.

Dixon's letter, along with other statements, asks present-day scholars to take seriously an archive of sounds (including the extra-musical) that make audible today the spaces (lived and performed) where black experimental music was produced. These sounds encourage consideration of the web of social and sonic relationships and networks that produced this music during the 1960s and helped constitute the raced and gendered discourse that gave it political resonance. Although much of what Dixon offers is particular to his time, place, and personal circumstances, he offers a nuanced understanding of black experimental music of the 1960s as a socially inflected, self-conscious and, ultimately, serious engagement with various modes

(2006); "'Born Out of Jazz . . . yet Embracing All Music': Race, Gender, and Technology in George Russell's Lydian Chromatic Concept," in *Big Ears: Listening to Gender in Jazz Studies*, ed. Sherrie Tucker and Nichole Rustin (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 210–34.

[6] Dixon and Dunn's collaboration is addressed in detail (half a chapter) in Danielle Goldman, *I Want to Be Ready: Improvised Dance as a Practice of Freedom* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); and briefly (a few pages) in Melinda Buckwalter, *Composing While Dancing: An Improviser's Companion* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011). See Francis Davis, "Bill Dixon's Dance Notation," *Village Voice*, 13 July 2011, for a comment on the inattention to the Dixon/Dunn collaboration in jazz studies.

of artistic production and thought, carried out under conditions both difficult and inspiring.

The Voice Letter

After the salutation and explanation of why he recorded the letter, Dixon praises Kofsky for a recent *Jazz* article about Archie Shepp and, specifically, for his "willing[ness] to speak out for those things that I think most people intrinsically know but just refuse to face." In that review of Shepp's *On This Night*, Kofsky praised the saxophonist and other politically outspoken musicians, including Dixon, and went after critics Don De Michael and Martin Williams for "misrepresent[ing] Black Nationalism as black *supremacy*."[7] Dixon then expresses his gratitude for Kofsky's interest in doing an article on him, explaining that there had not yet been "any stories done on my work." He tells Kofsky, "I'll give you some information, which you may use in any manner that you see fit. I trust your judgment."

Dixon offers a bit of autobiography, conforming to the familiar opening of the jazz musician interview. He notes his birth on Nantucket Island, Massachusetts, in 1925 and describes being raised in New York. He mentions spending two years at Boston University studying visual art before service in a segregated unit during World War II disrupted his studies. On his return, he recalls, he took advantage of the G.I. Bill to study "for four years in a conservatory" (the Hartnett School of Music in New York) and then "for another four years" with the composer Carl B. Bowman, with whom he had worked at Hartnett.[8]

Dixon's voice letter begins to sound less like a response to interview questions and more like a critical intervention as he describes his precarious status as a worker and an artist. "I've done the usual music jobs," he says, "playing in the mountains, playing for weddings, playing for social dances, playing for rallies, playing commercially. A little symphonic work, that kind that's eked out to most Negroes." His ability to earn a living had become more difficult, however, after he had gained enough confidence "in my own music to start to play it exclusively" a few years earlier.[9]

Dixon describes the problems posed by "bad people" in the music world and not only from "the commercial people that bleed the creative people dry." He expresses his frustration that "contemporaries," including some of his students, had received more attention than he had, and that he had done only one and a half recordings

[7] Frank Kofsky, Review of *On This Night*, *Jazz* (November 1966): 30–32.

[8] Dixon began his studies at Hartnett in 1946. The Hartnett School of Music was also known as the Hartnett Conservatory and Hartnett Studios. See *All About Jazz* staff, "Bill Dixon: Excerpts from Vade Mecum," *All About Jazz*, 10 January 2010; Bill Dixon, "To Whom It May Concern," *Coda* 8/4 (November 1967), 4–5.

[9] Although not mentioned in the voice letter, Dixon's decision to focus on original music in 1962 coincided with his leaving a job at the United Nations Secretariat, where he had worked since 1958 and founded and run a music discussion and listening group. See Young, *Dixonia*, 43, 46–47; Dixon CV in Bill Dixon, *L'Opera: A Collection of Letters, Writings, Musical Scores, Drawings, and Photographs (1967–1986)* [Volume 1] (North Bennington, VT: Metamorphosis Music, BMI, 1986), final, unnumbered page.

as a leader.[10] Dixon then takes a detour through a generally positive account of his recent music and his collaboration with Dunn. "I'm now playing and writing better than I've ever done in my life," he says. "I feel more positive about my work than I've ever felt in my life." He and Dunn, he continues, have "produced quite an eloquent body of work by anybody's standards." But the lack of favorable responses to their work makes it "difficult to not be angry." Dixon details specific, hurtful run-ins with musicians and critics and then puts his travails into a broader music world context. "So I resent being trod upon. I don't like it one bit. But others have been trod upon. Schoenberg resented the attention that Stravinsky got, and it goes ad infinitum." With that, Dixon concludes the letter, apologizing for the delay in answering Kofsky's inquiry, promising to follow up in writing, and explaining that "the struggle seems to take most of the time."

The recording ends with a two-minute postscript that was apparently added some months later. Dixon describes a taped interview with Kofsky, apparently conducted after he recorded the primary part of the voice letter. He reports a discussion with *Jazz* editor Pauline Rivelli about publishing the interview there. No interview with Dixon appeared in *Jazz*, but its successor, *Jazz and Pop*, with Kofsky now serving as associate editor, published his essay "Contemporary Jazz: an Assessment" in November 1967.[11]

Turning to the recording's sonic aspects, Dixon made the voice letter on a reel-to-reel tape recorder. The main part of the recording has some reverb, as if the voice letter had been made in a large, indoor space, such as a warehouse or loft, without much acoustical dampening material such as rugs or drapes. This factor suggests that the main part of the recording was made in Dunn's loft on Sixth Avenue. A second factor is that Dixon and Dunn frequently rehearsed and studied at the space, and Dixon may have kept his recording equipment there.[12] Yet another is the sound of the street, as discussed below. The postscript lacks the reverb and ambient noise, indicating that it was recorded elsewhere.

Dixon speaks formally and with precision on both parts of the recording. He is deliberate and usually fills pauses with silence rather than "uhs," "ums," "ers," or other utterances. Dixon's voice is to some extent racially ambivalent. The listener might recognize it as a "black" voice if s/he knows it was recorded by Dixon, and to my ear it sounds very much like that of other black men of his generation who have articulated respectability (whether based on class, education, profession, self-worth, or something else) and a refusal of stereotype by embracing a gravitas of tone, formality of restricted vocal modulation, and precise diction. Dixon does not have a southern or other regional accent typically associated with

[10] *Archie Shepp–Bill Dixon Quartet*, Savoy MG-12178, 1962; *Bill Dixon 7-tette/Archie Shepp and the New York Contemporary Five*, Savoy MG-12184, 1964.

[11] Bill Dixon, "Contemporary Jazz: An Assessment," *Jazz and Pop* 6/11 (November 1967): 31–32. Kofsky's taped interview with Dixon is not part of the Kofsky Collection. Dixon described themes in the *Jazz and Pop* piece that often came up in interviews Kofsky conducted at this time, but this essay does not appear to be based on a transcription of an interview. Dixon recalled that the *Jazz and Pop* essay was originally submitted to *Freedomways* for publication in its Spring 1967 issue. When *Freedomways* did not publish it, he remembered, he turned to *Jazz and Pop*. Young, *Dixonia*, 394.

[12] Young, *Dixonia*, 98, 108, 117.

blackness, and he refrains for the most part from colloquialisms or vernacular English often recognized as components of "black speech." Only on the postscript can one briefly hear Dunn's presence, but she is barely audible. She makes an indecipherable comment as Dixon describes his conversation with Rivelli, prompting both of them to laugh and Dixon to tell Kofsky, "that's Judy laughing in the background." She laughs again when Dixon announces his "smile" after stating "that we are working feverishly here, Judy and I, in New York and hoping that things will get better."

Dixon's silences allow the listener to hear better the ambient sounds on the main part of the recording, most of which come from the street. The recording sounds like it was made near an open window. Audible on the tape is the undifferentiated hum of a large city. Occasionally a human voice on the street is heard. Much more prominent throughout the recording is the sound of traffic, which unfolds in dynamic counterpoint to Dixon's voice. There is the hiss of tires on pavement and the low roar of multiple internal combustion engines; the occasional acceleration or deceleration of large vehicles; a few instances of screeching brakes and a traffic cop's whistle. But mostly there are horns. There are horns of different pitches and timbres, from large and small vehicles. They come in staccato bursts, indicating drivers in motion, avoiding obstacles like double parked cars or errant pedestrians, rather than those stuck in a traffic jam. At times the changing pitch of individual horns is a result of the Doppler effect as vehicles move toward and away from the open window.[13] These sonic qualities immediately struck me when first hearing the recording and inspired much of the analysis that follows.

The Voice Letter's Contexts

Revisiting Dixon's work with the Jazz Composers Guild begins the process of contextualizing the voice letter's comments about working conditions and hurtful encounters with colleagues. The Guild emerged at a moment of rising political consciousness and activism among musicians and growing commitment to performing original music. Accordingly, the group produced concerts by its members while seeking to transform the conditions under which they labored. The Guild developed a collectivist approach to securing gigs, creating better facilities for performance, rehearsal, and education, and attempting to extricate musicians from the nightclub and recording economies to put pressure on such businesses to treat

[13] I have not been able to find evidence of other Dixon voice letters, but they may exist. Dixon wrote many letters over the years. Since the early 1960s he had been taping his own performances and rehearsals, and he later taped his lecture-demonstrations and classes. But any comparisons of the 1966 voice letter with other voice letters will have to wait for other scholars (and perhaps serendipity as well). Moreover, although it would no doubt be interesting to compare this voice letter with other available recordings of Dixon's voice—e.g., the interview disc included with the *Odyssey* box set or comments made in the 1981 film *Imagine the Sound*—I am restricting my analysis to the 1966 voice letter so as to make this project manageable and maintain focus on that period. See Monica Hairston O'Connell and Sherrie Tucker, "Not One to Toot Her Own Horn (?): Melba Liston's Oral Histories and Classroom Presentations," *Black Music Research Journal* 34/1 (Spring 2014): 121–58, for an excellent example of what can be accomplished by analyzing the sounds of a musician's interviewed voice at different points in her career.

them better. Dixon and his colleagues had their successes. The 1964 October Revolution concerts and the subsequent Four Days in December concerts at Judson Hall brought significant critical and industry attention, energizing musicians and fans alike. Guild members used the organization to bring exploitative conditions in the music industry to light, and the organization ultimately provided a model for collective organizing upon which other musicians would build.

Yet, in Benjamin Piekut's words, the Guild "began with disagreement, continued with dissension, and ended in dispute, anger, and disappointment." Conflicts broke out along racial and gender lines. Sun Ra, well known for his misogyny, distrusted Carla Bley and made her participation difficult. Although other men in the Guild, including Dixon, defended her role in the Guild and praised her musicianship, she was still considered an "exceptional woman" who had earned a place in a natural domain of men.[14] African American members tended to see the Guild as an organization committed to black self-determination, whereas white members often evaded the issue of racism and saw the group as more narrowly committed to its members' economic and aesthetic goals. Black members were themselves divided over the extent to which the Guild should be dedicated to black nationalism, interracial solidarity, or both. Such tensions contributed to the group's dissolution after six months of existence, although the proximate causes were group members' struggles to balance commitments to the collective with those to their own careers. Dixon, who wanted to use the group to transform working conditions for musicians radically and permanently, was aggravated by other members whom he thought merely saw the Guild as a vehicle for creating individual opportunities in the music industry as it currently existed.[15]

The breakup of the Guild over the first half of 1965 took a physical and mental toll on Dixon. He was frequently ill during the organization's last weeks and spent part of the period on hiatus in Chicago. After his return, performing original music in New York remained a precarious enterprise. Dixon took on writing and arranging jobs, supplementing them with clerical and other low-wage work in order to survive.[16] Yet by 1966 there were reasons to be optimistic, thanks to his developing relationship with Dunn, who had introduced herself after encountering Dixon and his music at Aldo and Elsa Tambellini's November 1965 multimedia performance, "Black Zero," at the Astor Place Playhouse.[17] Exploring this collaboration is another necessary step in contextualizing the voice letter.

[14] For more on the discourse of "exceptional women" in jazz see Sherrie Tucker, "Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies," *Current Musicology* 71–73 (Spring 2001/2002): 376–408; and Nichole T. Rustin, "'Mary Lou Williams Plays Like a Man': Gender, Genius, and Difference in Black Music Discourse," *Atlantic Quarterly* 104/3 (2005): 445–62.

[15] Benjamin Piekut, "Race, Community, and Conflict in the Jazz Composers Guild," *Jazz Perspectives* 3/3 (December 2009): 203–6, 221–30; Benjamin Piekut, "New Thing? Gender and Sexuality in the Jazz Composers Guild," *American Quarterly* 62/1 (March 2010): 28–29, 36–43; Iain Anderson, *This Is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 140–41; Robert Levin, "The Jazz Composers Guild: An Assertion of Dignity," *Down Beat*, 6 May 1965, 17–18; Dixon *L'Opera*, 88.

[16] Young, *Dixonia*, 114; Anderson, *This Is Our Music*, 84.

[17] Dixon had long been interested in dance, learning about it from friends, acquaintances, and "interpretive" dancers accompanying groups in which he played. Earlier in the decade he had

Dunn and Dixon quickly developed a creatively close and intensely collaborative relationship as they began to perform (as a duo and with others) and teach together in New York and elsewhere. They read music journals together and held serious listening sessions to which both brought recordings. They studied one another's work and theorized the relationship of music and dance. Although Dixon was the professional musician, he learned much from Dunn's musical sensibility, critical acumen, and knowledge acquired from careful listening. Moreover, they both limited their performances with others over the course of their seven-year working relationship. Dunn ceased using anyone else's music in her dance pieces and stopped appearing in other choreographers' works. Although he occasionally performed with others' ensembles without Dunn, Dixon did not organize live performances himself without incorporating Dunn's dancing.[18]

Beginning with their co-created composition "Groundspeed," they developed what Danielle Goldman calls an "ensemblic relation," a practice in which each artist was encouraged to develop individually and take creative chances while supporting the collaborative relationship, and where neither music nor dance was subordinate. As Dixon put it in the voice letter, "We work independently and collectively. It's never music accompanying dance or vice versa, but at the same time it's both." The idea was that dual creative investments and mutual fulfillment would lead to a natural consonance within the creative work. As Dunn described it, "the collaboration has provided not only a performance situation of increased dimensions, but also a laboratory for exchange, experimentation, teaching, and a means to extend into other areas inaccessible to either as individual artists."[19]

Dixon and Dunn understood their collaborative works to be in continual development, calling into question a normative, teleological understanding of the relationship between "rehearsal" and "performance." As Dunn put it, "The performance, while special, is no longer the climax of the total working existence. The quality, concentration, energy and attention remain equal whether the moment is called rehearsal or performance."[20] This approach was consistent with one Dixon had applied to his music going back to the late 1950s. He eventually facilitated the approach by making and archiving tape recordings of formal and informal performances. He did so with increasing frequency during the Jazz Composers Guild period and more consistently around the time he and Dunn began working together. Recording rehearsals and performances enabled Dixon and Dunn to document musical works at various stages in their development. This practice facilitated an understanding of their compositions as protean works, always open

collaborated with Drid Williams and Elaine Shipman. For details see Young, *Dixonia*, 25, 30–31, 38–39, 61, 80–90.

[18] Goldman, *I Want to Be Ready*, 69–70; Young, *Dixonia*, 92–93; Bill Dixon, "Collaboration: 1965–1972," *Contact Quarterly* 10/2 (Spring/Summer 1985): 7–8.

[19] Young, *Dixonia*, 92, 116; Goldman, *I Want to Be Ready*, 71; Jack Anderson, "Judith Dunn and the Endless Quest," *Dance Magazine* (November 1967), 51; Judith Dunn, liner notes for The Bill Dixon Orchestra, *Intents and Purposes*. RCA Victor LPM-3844, [1967], 2010.

[20] Dunn, liner notes, *Intents and Purposes*.

to revision.[21] They also tried to keep the meanings of pieces ambiguous, open to audience interpretation, and without a clear relation between their titles and their constitutive creative elements. Dixon reported in the voice letter telling the Hunter College audience, "You can make up stories for yourselves if that's what makes you comfortable. And you can find the music programmatic, if you want to; I really don't care. But it isn't done that way. The product, the music and the dance, are simply what they are. There are no stories. There are no symbols. One of these days, I guess, we won't even have any titles."[22]

Dixon and Dunn's creative relationship was mutually transformative. Dunn was already distancing herself from Cunningham's approach, developing a critique of the rules governing avant-garde dance as an embodied and visually perceived practice. She worked to de-familiarize the performance space, experimenting with choreography that brought her performing body closer to the audience than they expected. She also interrogated the gendering of avant-garde dancing bodies that moved in this space. "Have you ever thought how bound by convention dance is?" she asked later. "We have set ideas of how a dancer should look and what they should wear. . . . As for me, the first thing I did when I left the Cunningham company was to cut my hair."[23] But Dunn described her collaboration with Dixon as "a second choreographic beginning for me," enabling her to realize fully the artistic freedom she had been pursuing since her days with Cunningham. "I do exactly and only in my work that which interests me," she said. "My collaboration with Bill Dixon enhances and furthers these acts."[24]

Dunn's creative transformation stemmed in part from reassessing and transforming her approach to improvisation. With the Judson group, she had used chance operations to choreograph dancing that seemed spontaneous. But these movements, although randomly chosen during the composition process, were carefully planned out before Dunn took the stage. Although it was a difficult for her, she began to choreograph on stage, in real time. "Improvisation" in dance, as she put it, began to mean "composing and performing simultaneously. . . . One considers structure, order, space, time, materials and tone and one practices daily to make these decisions quickly, conscientiously and with control."[25] Dunn and Dixon's presentation of "Pomegranate" at the Newport Jazz Festival in August 1966, with an expanded group that included bassist Bob Cunningham, drummer Tom Price, tenor saxophonist Louis Brown, and reed player Ken McIntyre, was the first time

[21] Young, *Dixonia*, xi; Andrew Raffo Dewar, "Searching for the Center of a Sound: Bill Dixon's *Webern*, the Unaccompanied Solo, and Compositional Ontology in Post-Songform Jazz," *Jazz Perspectives* 4/1 (April 2010): 79–81.

[22] In the liner notes to *Intents and Purposes*, Dunn quotes Dixon as saying at Hunter College: "The music and dance are what they are. There are no stories, no symbols. One day we won't even have titles—or our titles will be poems in their own right."

[23] Cecelia Gable, untitled biographical sketch in "Judith Dunn, 1933–83," *Contact Quarterly* 9/1 (Fall 1983): 53; Anderson, "Judith Dunn and the Endless Quest," 50–51; Goldman, *I Want to Be Ready*, 57–61, 66.

[24] Gable, biographical sketch, 53; Judith Dunn, "A Letter to Helen," *Dance Perspectives* 38 (Summer 1969): 49.

[25] Goldman, *I Want to Be* Ready, 66, 68; Anderson, "Judith Dunn and the Endless Quest," 51; Dixon, "Collaboration: 1965–72," 8–9; Gable, biographical sketch.

Dunn significantly improvised, in real time, an entire performance. They rehearsed the piece at Dunn's Sixth Avenue loft and performed in the round at Newport, with the latter facilitating the performers' ability to hear one another and giving Dunn maximum room to dance when she was not "laying out" (literally, by lying on the floor) during other artists' solos.[26]

Dixon similarly described the collaboration as "allow[ing] me the most freedom and latitude to be completely myself." It led him to confront his tendency to seek fulfillment through virtuosic accomplishment rather than simply trying "to get done what I think needs to be done" for the music to sound right. Their shared commitment to continually transforming their works necessitated finding a happy medium between their commitment to inventing musical ideas in real time and reproducing in later performances those real-time inventions that worked best. Moreover, it was during the early years of their collaboration that Dixon began to question his rather authoritarian approach to rehearsing and directing musicians during performances of his own work.[27]

One manifestation of the Dixon/Dunn collaboration is Dixon's RCA album *Intents and Purposes*. Dixon was in the middle of making the album when he recorded the voice letter, on which he speaks enthusiastically about it.[28] *Intents and Purposes* is, on one level, a vindication of Dixon's decision several years earlier to focus on his own original material. As only the third recording under his own name and his first as solo leader for an entire album, "It was, indeed, my first crack at fuller artistic expression."[29] But the album expresses Dixon's goals as channeled through his collaboration with Dunn. In the liner notes, Dunn describes all the pieces as "either influenced, directly created, or germinated in the work/artistic situation created by Bill Dixon and dancer/choreographer Judith Dunn."[30]

The piece with the longest identifiable history is "Metamorphosis 1962–1966." Dixon began developing "Metamorphosis" as an AABA composition in 1962 while working with Archie Shepp. He wrote an arrangement of it with John Tchicai in mind because of the Afro-Danish saxophonist's predilection for playing big intervals rather than scalar lines. However, in keeping with the practice of writing protean compositions, Dixon had changed the piece radically by the time he presented a version of it with a septet at his and Dunn's Judson Memorial Church concert that July. But he continued working on it, keeping the "structural landmarks" similar but changing the instrumental parts for the 13:20 version recorded for RCA in October.[31]

[26] Dixon, "Collaboration: 1965–72," 10–12; Goldman, *I Want to Be Ready*, 68–69; Young, *Dixonia*, 98–99.

[27] Dixon, "To Whom It May Concern," 3; Anderson, "Judith Dunn and the Endless Quest," 67; Dixon, "Collaboration: 1965–1972," 10; Young, *Dixonia*, 111.

[28] Dixon began rehearsing for the session that September. The first studio date was 10 October, with two subsequent sessions in January and February 1967. The album was released later that year. See Young, *Dixonia*, 106–7, 110–11, 114, 118–19.

[29] Dixon, quoted from an unknown 3 June 1999 source in Jonathan Horwich, producer notes for The Bill Dixon Orchestra, *Intents and Purposes*. RCA Victor LPM-3844, [1967], 2010.

[30] Judith Dunn, original liner notes, *Intents and Purposes*.

[31] Young, *Dixonia*, 52, 54, 102, 106–8, 110–11. The protean nature of this composition is evident in the fact, as Young points out, that only a small part of the A section from an extant 1963 version

As recorded, "Metamorphosis 1962–1966" is a grand, episodic, through-composed piece with intricate, written ensemble sections over which individuals intermittently solo and shorter interludes by individual or small complements of instruments. Most prominently featured as soloists are Dixon on trumpet and flugelhorn, Robin Kenyatta on alto saxophone, Reggie Workman and Jimmy Garrison on basses, Kathi Norris on cello, and Dixon's student Marc Levin on percussion. Dixon later described "Metamorphosis 1962–1966" as "exactly where I was at the time. The recorded 'Metamorphosis' is for me the definitive version of the piece." The piece was "where [he] was at the time" in part because it expressed his goals as a composer invested in providing detailed instruction to his players via standard notation while simultaneously encouraging a degree of individual interpretation that he considered largely missing from "the European concert tradition."[32]

Dixon's realization of his and Dunn's creative vision was facilitated by his influence on the production of the session. The producers agreed to his request to record with a decet, even though his contract called for a quartet. They also let him record in the round as a means of privileging musical interactivity over stereo fidelity. Dixon further shaped the sound by helping to set the recording balance from the engineering booth. As he put it later, "My part—the very high line over all of the written parts—wasn't supposed to be 'virtuoso-trumpet-player-over-the-ensemble.' Traditionally, they would have raised the level of that part. The engineers couldn't understand why I would want to play all that stuff and it not be heard. I wanted it to have a wispy quality, but where you could still hear it." Downplaying his own voice as soloist allowed him to develop a more ensemblic texture while also defying critical expectations. "In other words," he later said, "it has always, to me, seemed a redundancy to write a composition and then use musicians sparingly, simply because it was felt that I, as the leader, should blow my brains out to show some uncomprehending and insensitive critic that, indeed, I did have the capability of sustaining a large amount of hearing time through an overt use of physicality." Dixon also defied convention by refusing to let critic Stanley Dance, invited to the studio by producer Brad McKuen, write the liner notes because he had not previously written about the trumpeter. He insisted instead that Dunn take on the job.[33]

Dixon returned to the studio in early 1967 to complete the album. In January a quintet recorded "Voices," which Dunn and Dixon had developed the previous summer. Dixon originally scored the piece for trumpet, flugelhorn, cornet, bass clarinet, cello, percussion, and voice. As Dunn describes it, "the voice functioned as a sound-making instrument and was always heard in duet with the trumpet." They had premiered "Voices" at the November 1966 Hunter College concert, with Dunn dancing and singing in a performance that also included Levin on pocket cornet, Norris on cello, Byard Lancaster on bass clarinet, and Bob Pozar (another Dixon student) on percussion. Dixon eliminated the vocals on the RCA recording,

of the piece written in AABA form made it into the 1966 version as the "long line theme" of the C section.

[32] Young, *Dixonia*, 110–11.

[33] Young, *Dixonia*, 106, 110; Dixon, *L'Opera*, 131–32.

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replacing them with Norris's cello lines now sharing center stage with his dynamic explorations of his own instrument's range and tonal palette.[34] Subsequently, Dixon recorded "Nightfall Pieces I" and "Nightfall Pieces II" as short, reflective works based on his solo work on trumpet. On the first, he overdubbed his own flugelhorn playing and a flute part by George Marge. On the second, he added a second trumpet part. Dixon adapted these performances from the twenty-minute "Nightfall Pieces" that he and Dunn had created for a larger group and premiered at a Dance Theater Workshop shortly before the recording.[35]

Critical Dilemmas

Dixon said in the voice letter that his and Dunn's work succeeded "by anybody's standards." That was not quite true. Although Dixon claimed elsewhere that his and Dunn's performance of "Pomegranate" at Newport had been received well, *Down Beat* critic Dan Morgenstern thought otherwise.[36] He said Dunn's "movements bore no relationship to the music." The fault was not hers, however, for "the music had almost no movement of its own to follow." Morgenstern's conclusion was even more damning. "This was boring music, a pale reflection of various models. Dixon fluffed through a Milesish flugelhorn solo; the sound was nice, but the execution wasn't. The impression was that of a serious, well-meaning amateur group with professional assistance performing at a small-town 'artistic' event."[37] Not only did such comments question Dixon's abilities, they likely brought up doubts as to whether he had fully developed an original approach to his instrument.[38] He responded directly to these comments in the voice letter. "When a man like Dan Morgenstern can use the printed page as a weapon against me, and try to reduce my performance at the Newport Jazz Festival as an amateur venture and make the analogy of my approach to music and trumpet playing as something that is akin to Miles Davis's, I deeply resent that."

Dixon was also concerned with dance critics' evaluations of Dunn's work. As Goldman puts it, Dunn and Dixon's "collaborations explored and openly acknowledged relations between black traditions of improvised music and the rather white world of postmodern dance," blurring the boundaries between them while simultaneously challenging raced and gendered assumptions about who these artists were

[34] Dunn, liner notes, *Intents and Purposes*; Young, *Dixonia*, 113–14.

[35] Young, *Dixonia*, 116, 118; Dunn, liner notes, *Intents and Purposes*.

[36] Dixon reported that he "felt incredible doing it" and noted that the larger-than-usual afternoon audience of 3,000 for a "new music" program—John Coltrane and Pharaoh Saunders were also on the bill—responded positively. He added that Coltrane liked it as well. Dixon, "Collaboration: 1965–1972," 12.

[37] Dan Morgenstern, "Newport Report," *Down Beat*, 11 August 1966, 38. Also commenting negatively on this performance was the *New Yorker*'s Whitney Balliett, who said, "Bill Dixon presented a dull five-part dirge that was danced to by Judith Dunn, who resembled a melting ice-cream cone." See Balliett, *Collected Works: A Journal of Jazz, 1954–2000* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 273, quoted in Goldman, *I Want to Be Ready*, 69.

[38] Dixon later acknowledged the influence of Davis on his pre-1970s playing, going on to say, "when I finally became myself the overtness of the influence abated because it wasn't necessary; it became an impediment." Dixon, *L'Opera*, 89–90.

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and how they were supposed to relate on stage and in their social interactions.[39] It may be precisely for these reasons that some critics could not or would not appreciate the work. As Dixon recalled later, "When Judy and I began to work together, I saw the way the dance world treated our collaboration and the way the music world treated it, and we were socially involved, too. It was a very racist attitude: she was isolated, and I always thought it was both because of her associations with this music and specifically with a Black man."[40] And so, in the voice letter, Dixon, assuming a sympathetic listener in Kofsky, and perhaps a partner in need of encouragement, affirms Dunn's artistic legitimacy. "Judy, I don't know if you know—I should tell you this because we are partners in what we do—was with Merce Cunningham for about five years. I only tell this to people so that when they see her do something, if they have to, they can at least understand that she does do it by choice."

Such criticisms were not entirely new for Dixon. His politics and challenge to white critical and financial authority in the jazz world led some white jazz writers to dismiss him.[41] Dixon suggests in the voice letter that he has taken some heat for his self-determinative politics from white critics and other gatekeepers. "People talk about," he reports, "or try to make me believe, at least, that Crow Jim is just as bad as Jim Crow. I don't believe that. In this instance the chicken or the egg did come first." The reference here is to the "Crow Jim" debates in the jazz community during the 1960s, which followed claims by some white critics and musicians that efforts by black musicians to define jazz as an African American art form, give hiring preference to other black musicians, or engage in race-conscious activism constituted reverse racism. Moreover, even those white writers who praised or provided more balanced accounts of the Guild's and its members' activities usually paid little or no attention to Dixon's music, choosing instead to focus on his organizational activities and political commentary, or they gave the music mixed reviews.[42]

Some African American critics also found Dixon's politics more notable than his playing. After chastising Morgenstern in the voice letter, Dixon says he "also deeply resent[s]" poet and critic A. B. Spellman's celebratory review in *The Nation* of Cecil Taylor's performance at the Four Days in December concert at the expense of Dixon's the same evening. Spellman begins that review with the claim that "Dixon is a far better organizer than musician," asserting also that his playing is "overshadowed" by his band members. Dixon is forced to play quietly, he adds, "because, as the musicians say, his chops are down: his lips are too soft because of lack of practice."[43]

[39] Goldman, *I Want to Be Ready*, 57, 62, 69.
[40] Young, *Dixonia*, 92.
[41] Kofsky, *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music*, 63; Young, *Dixonia*, 45.
[42] Dan Morgenstern and Martin Williams, "The October Revolution: Two Views of the Avant Garde in Action," *Down Beat*, 19 November 1964, 15, 33; Peter Weldon, "Bill Dixon/Archie Shepp," *Down Beat*, 8 October 1964, 27–28; John S. Wilson, "Concert Unveils Free-Form Jazz," *New York Times*, 30 December 1964, 14; Don Heckman, "Caught in the Act," *Down Beat*, 11 February 1965, 37–38; Balliett, "Comes the Revolution," *New Yorker*, 27 February 1965, reprinted as "The New Thing" in Balliett, *Collected Works*, 231–35; Levin, "Jazz Composers Guild."
[43] A. B. Spellman, "Jazz at the Judson," *The Nation*, 8 February 1965, 150.

Piekut situates Spellman's review as part of an ongoing series of conflicts between Dixon and Shepp and between Dixon and Black Arts Movement intellectuals such as Spellman and LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka). He shows how tensions within the Jazz Composers Guild paralleled and were informed by these conflicts. Although Dixon and Shepp had performed together extensively beginning in 1961 and recorded albums together in 1962 and 1964, they were not on speaking terms by the October Revolution concerts. Part of the reason, in Dixon's estimation, was that Jones and others had decided that Shepp would be "the next public figure in the music." Jones produced concerts featuring Shepp and, at one point, billed a 1962 Dixon–Shepp sextet concert under Shepp's name. He also wrote a laudatory November 1963 article on Don Cherry, in which he praised the original compositions of the New York Contemporary Five (of which Shepp was also a member) without mentioning that Dixon (who was not a member) had written some of them as well as many of the group's arrangements. The following year, Jones deemed Shepp's side of their split 1964 Savoy record as the more important one. Before he wrote his harsh assessment of Dixon's performance at the Judson, Spellman had stated in a review of Shepp and Dixon's 1962 album that Dixon had "relatively less technical skill" than his colleague and that he "play[ed] with a borrowed melodic ear" and a "fuzzy and indefinite" tone.[44]

Piekut argues that such critiques were fueled by a sense that Dixon, despite his commitment to black self-determination, was suspect because of his desire to sustain the Guild as a multiracial organization and dedicate himself more generally to interracial organizing. Piekut also notes that conflicts between Dixon and black-nationalist musicians and critics were generational and gendered. In the minds of some of the younger radicals, Dixon was both aesthetically and politically inadequate; his politics were overly beholden to an earlier, feminized, and possibility queer integrationist and bohemian social vision; and his playing was too introspective and minimalist, standing at odds with the frequently celebrated dynamism and emotional intensity of Shepp, Ayler, and Coltrane, whose playing exemplified "the tropes of dominant free jazz masculinity." By describing Dixon as not measuring up to his band members, with lips "soft" because of a lack of practice, Piekut argues, Spellman positions Dixon as "a shrinking violet" who is "overshadowed by the men in his band."[45]

Dixon, however, was not without his own investments in masculinist solidarity, racial authenticity, and generational difference, and he could also be judgmental and uncompromising. He was sometimes critical of fellow African Americans whom he

[44] Piekut, "Race, Community, and Conflict," 205–10; Young, *Dixonia*, 33, 37; LeRoi Jones, "Don Cherry—Making It the Hard Way," *Down Beat*, 21 November 1963, 16–18, 34; LeRoi Jones, "Apple Cores," *Down Beat*, 17 December 1964, 40; A. B. Spellman, "Archie Shepp/Bill Dixon Quartet," *Kulchur* 3/11 (Autumn 1963): 94–95. Black nationalist critics were not the only ones to praise Shepp's playing on record over Dixon's. See, for example, Weldon, "Bill Dixon–Archie Shepp," 27–28.

[45] Piekut, "Race, Community, and Conflict," 210–20; Piekut, "New Thing?," 30–34. Spellman actually did have a point about Dixon's soft playing. Dixon had developed embouchure problems in mid-1963 and had taken some time off from performing. His 1964 recording with Shepp was his first since the trouble, and he subsequently admitted his sound was not as "secure" as it might have been. See Young, *Dixonia*, 62, 66.

did not think comported themselves appropriately. In the voice letter, he expresses his resentment towards "colleagues in music who do not rise to defend their brothers in music or in art." This complaint is likely a reference to his Guild-colleague and New York Contemporary Five-member John Tchicai, who had been featured in a February 1966 *Down Beat* article by Morgenstern titled "John Tchicai: A Calm Member of the Avant-Garde." Later, Dixon said that the two "fell out" over Tchicai's quoted comments therein, in which the saxophonist indicated that some black musicians had overemphasized racial inequality in the music business and stated specifically that the Guild had devolved into "a childish masquerade that seemed to have nothing to do with any of us and least of all with music." Dixon later asserted that Tchicai, whom he identified as a "Danish Negro" who was "extremely naïve" about race issues in the United States, did not realize the extent to which he had been manipulated by *Down Beat* in its strategy "to pit us (the members of the music) against each other."[46]

Yet Dixon also thought that black musicians' own aesthetic politics sometimes went too far. In 1976 he wrote about "black music" as a serious artistic enterprise but also one predicated on serious black musicians and composers being "relegated solely to the domains of [their] own music and the nature of that kind of inflection or way of hearing and doing things musical." In this context, "phony theatrics, excessive posturing, and not enough sincerity or humility" could "alter and affect the credibility of the music."[47]

Writing (and Speaking) Back

One of Dixon's earliest published forays into the jazz discourse troubles the logic of his black-nationalist interlocutors while drawing attention to his own music and politics. In a letter published in the 2 January 1964 issue of *Down Beat*, Dixon takes issue with Jones's failure to acknowledge his role in shaping the New York Contemporary Five's repertoire of original music.[48] Turning Jones's well-known appraisal of the state of jazz writing in "Jazz and the White Critic"—recently published in *Down Beat*—back on its author, Dixon says that Jones's writing reflects a "turgid self-conscious 'in-group' superiority generally and rightly associated with pseudo-intellectuals."[49] Anticipating Ralph Ellison's well-known critique of Jones's *Blues People*, which Ellison published the following month, Dixon suggests that Jones's "constant pitting of the sociological with the musical" betrays an agenda less concerned with understanding or supporting the music than with establishing his own bona fides as a writer.[50] The broader implication is that black nationalist

[46] Dan Morgenstern, "John Tchicai: A Calm Member of the Avant-Garde," *Down Beat*, 10 February 1966; Dixon, *L'Opera*, 19–20.

[47] Dixon, *L'Opera*, 48.

[48] Bill Dixon, "Dixon Digs at Jones," *Down Beat*, 2 January 1964, 9. See also Piekut, "Race, Community, and Conflict," 209.

[49] Dixon, "Dixon Digs at Jones," 6; LeRoi Jones, "Jazz and the White Critic," *Down Beat*, 15 August 1963, 16–17, 34. Jones called jazz critics "anything but intellectuals" and "middle-brows," among other names.

[50] Ellison's review was published in *New York Review*, 6 February 1964, reprinted in Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1994), 247–58. Ellison famously wrote,

orientations not only encourage opportunism among cultural workers but also lead to critical myopia.[51]

The 1966 voice letter augmented such critique—in part, by also targeting white liberal critics—while seeking to draw more attention to Dixon's own music and ideas in the form of a published piece by Kofsky. This critical intervention was eventually realized in part by Dixon's aforementioned *Jazz and Pop* essay, "Contemporary Jazz: an Assessment," and his *Coda* essay, "To Whom It May Concern," also published in November 1967. These writings coincided with the release of *Intents and Purposes*.

As in the voice letter, Dixon devotes significant space in both pieces to his biography and his work with Dunn as a means of correcting the critical record. He also devotes considerable attention to the many challenges facing black musical experimentalists: their immersion in an exploitative and acoustically problematic (i.e., noisy) nightclub system despite having moved the music in avant-garde, intellectual directions; musicians' acquiescence to this situation; a perceived lack of support for the new music by black audiences; and an economy of criticism in which fair assessments of the music are often compromised by critics' amateurishness, primitivism, lack of musical knowledge, financial arrangements with record companies, attempts at provocation in order to gain readership, professional aspirations more generally, and propensity for letting personal relationships, biases, and desire for acceptance by musicians influence their writing.[52]

Dixon takes specific umbrage in the *Coda* piece with the ways primitivist and black-nationalist critical discourse coalesced to misrepresent black experimental musical practice and negatively affect the production of the music.

> Why talk endlessly about how difficult it is to stay alive? Anyone can look at you and, knowing what you do, glean much of that information for themselves. We don't have to wear sandwich boards on our backs saying that we're black and creative. The creative person in the society has a terrible time, let alone the black creative person who, in addition to all else is denied full admittance to the society. Everyone knows this and they aren't going to change it. So what are you going to do?[53]

While recognizing the need to address real problems facing black experimental artists, Dixon suggests that the critical expectation that musicians perform their politics prevents some of them from pursuing the full range of their creative interests. He extends the critique by suggesting that some "jazz musicians" and their critical supporters are buying into a kind of anti-intellectualism by rejecting written music or the classical tradition. Instead, he argues, musicians should be musically

"The tremendous burden of sociology which Jones would place upon this body of music is enough to give even the blues the blues" (249). Apparently, Dixon also wrote a review of Jones's *Blues People* that *Freedomways* would not publish because it was too critical. Young, *Dixonia*, 32.

[51] Dixon extends these critiques in a 1967 review of Spellman's book *Four Lives in the Bebop Business*. See William R. Dixon, "Jazz Through Four Innovators," *Freedomways* (Spring 1967): 255–57.

[52] Dixon, "To Whom It May Concern," 3–6, 8–10; Dixon, "Contemporary Jazz: an Assessment," 31–32.

[53] Dixon, "To Whom It May Concern," 4.

multilingual, operating fully within the various musical systems to which they can have access.[54]

Dixon also interrogates the relationship of this music to its political context, in particular to the black freedom struggle. Recalling in the *Coda* piece a conversation with a European writer about this subject, he argues that if "there is a revolution going on, . . . it is certainly not going hand-in-hand with the musical revolution." Black people playing "music that is in so-called revolution" and black people "in revolution" may be from the "same neighborhoods" but "apparently don't see eye-to-eye."[55] Describing in the *Jazz and Pop* piece his contributions to "what was to be labeled the Jazz Revolution," he also pushes back more generally on the "vain attempt to link the current civil rights movement, black nationalism and the emergence of [new movements in] jazz."[56] He knows there is reciprocity between music and politics. Jazz musicians have helped shaped black communities' radicalization, and social and political movements have influenced the way musicians think about themselves and their art. But he refuses to see the music as a direct reflection of political change or sentiment.

In these ways, Dixon extends the critiques he made in his earliest, brief forays into the jazz press, through the activist project of the Jazz Composers Guild and in the voice letter. The content of these essays suggest that, consistent with Dixon's and Dunn's practice of composing constantly evolving works and recording various instantiations of them as a means of facilitating their development, the voice letter may be seen as a kind of rehearsal of, though no less important version of, a more "definitive" critique put forth in the *Jazz and Pop* and *Coda* pieces and developed further in later writings. An understanding of the voice letter as an iteration of this critique can be extended, however, by paying more attention to its specifically performative aspects—that is, the sound of Dixon's voice and the ambient sounds on the tape—as well as to the tape recording technology itself.

Performing the Critique

Sound studies scholars have shown how artist and hobbyist uses of tape recording technology in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s could both reinforce and disrupt social, political, or performative norms. Jennifer Stoever-Ackerman, for example, connects the rise of what she calls "the *listening ear* of the largely white, male, middle-class aficionados who purchased" tape recorders with race, class, and gender normativity, self-censorship, and political orthodoxy in the early Cold War period. Aficionados, she continues, deployed these technologies to control their domestic soundscapes, "often at the expense of other[ed] sounds and others' desires." However, while examining the work of sound documentarian Tony Schwartz, Stoever-Ackerman uncovers often-contradictory meanings (both radical and reactionary) vis-à-vis race, gender, and other social categories that might be

[54] Dixon, "To Whom It May Concern," 5.
[55] Dixon, "To Whom It May Concern," 6–7.
[56] Dixon, "Contemporary Jazz: an Assessment," 32.

found on tape recordings made for different purposes during this period.[57] Brandon LaBelle, meanwhile, emphasizes the disruptive (and the performative) in his analysis of sound poets' use of tape recorders to extend their embodied manipulation of language, describing their "attempts to disturb and release the individual body through acts of doubling, decentering, replicating, and transmitting beyond its perceived limits."[58]

Such contradictory deployments of this emergent technology have played out in particular ways in the jazz world. Douglas Daniels has shown that musicians often used the occasion of the critic's or scholar's taped interview or oral history as a means of getting one's voice heard, "set[ting] the record straight," so to speak, in the face of critical misrepresentation, even though this technology still stood as a signifier of the power imbalance of the interviewer/interviewee relationship.[59] Monica Hairston O'Connell and Sherrie Tucker extend this line of thought by attending to the sonic aspects of recorded oral histories. In their account of oral histories and taped classroom presentations given by composer and trombonist Melba Liston, they focus not only on what Liston said but also on how she said it, arguing that such "instances of verbal self-representation provide rich insights into the ways … jazz ideals were reached or fell short as part of the social processes involved with constructing [musicians'] gendered, artistic, and professional identities."[60]

Self-recordings by black experimental musicians from the 1950s and 1960s, whether for study, posterity or intervention, can showcase such contemporaneous social processes and identity formations differently than the oral history or the interview conducted by someone else. They can also call into question critical or scholarly assumptions about the music. According to Robin D. G. Kelley, extant home recordings of Thelonious Monk's practice sessions from the late 1950s show, contrary to the interpretations of critics who saw Monk's playing as natural or instinctual, that "Monk's distinct sound was a product of unceasing discipline, practice, and hard work."[61] Similarly, George E. Lewis notes that recordings of early Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) meetings illustrate "the awakenings of subalterns to the power of speech. Moreover, in direct contradiction to the overwhelming commentary on the AACM, terms such as 'new jazz,' 'the avant-garde,' or 'free jazz' were seldom, if ever, used in these discussions."[62]

[57] Jennifer Stoever-Ackerman, "Reproducing U.S. Citizenship in *Blackboard Jungle:* Race, Cold War Liberalism, and the Tape Recorder," *American Quarterly* 63/3 (September 2011): 782–83, 89; Jennifer Stoever-Ackerman, "Splicing the Sonic Color-Line: Tony Schwartz Remixes Postwar Nueva York," *Social Text* 28/1 (Spring 2010): 59–85.

[58] Brandon LaBelle, "Raw Orality: Sound Poetry and Live Bodies," in *Voice: Vocal Aesthetics in Digital Arts and Media,* ed. Norie Neumark, Ross Gibson, and Theo van Leeuwen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 157.

[59] Douglas Henry Daniels, "Oral History, Masks, and Protocol in the Jazz Community," *Oral History Review* 15 (Spring 1987): 149–51; Hairston O'Connell and Tucker, "Not One to Toot Her Own Horn (?)," 131–32.

[60] Hairston O'Connell and Tucker, "Not One to Toot Her Own Horn (?)," 125.

[61] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Thelonious Monk: The Life and Times of an American Original* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 217–18.

[62] George E. Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 98.

Dixon's voice letter can be added to this archive of recorded self-presentation. I proceed with my analysis by, first, characterizing the voice letter as a kind of solo performance that expresses his perspective on art, society, and the critical discourse about the music through both the content of his words and the sound of his voice. This analysis is in part inspired by the fact that Dixon, as shown in the "Nightfall" pieces, as recorded for *Intents and Purposes*, was at this time making the solo instrumental voice more central to his project.[63] He began to think that if there was so much emphasis on the solo in improvised musical performance, and if the "tradition" of soloing had evolved to the point of providing a sufficient platform from which to build, then "a solo could now be the piece of music. There didn't need to be an excuse for it. It went where the soloist wanted it to go. It could be composed of the elements that were necessary for its being and being done."[64]

In his analysis of Dixon's solo work "Webern," Andrew Raffo Dewar characterizes some of Dixon's solo work as "going to the center of a sound," as Dixon himself noted. Dewar describes the process as "mak[ing] what might traditionally be called a solo's climax the primary subject of exploration," noting the connection to Dixon's sometime-collaborator Cecil Taylor's mid-1960s interest in moving away from a compositional focus on "long forms" to explore instead "the kernel, the short musical statement." It appears that Dixon was thinking about moving in this direction around the time he recorded the voice letter. He had performed on Taylor's *Conquistador*, recorded on 6 October 1966, only four days before the "Metamorphosis" session, and he later said that while he "liked the sound [he] got on the RCA Victor record," he "couldn't keep it" while "working on other things."[65]

As a kind of solo performance, Dixon's voice letter extends his critique at the interface of voice with both the normative and disruptive functions of tape recording technology. To some degree he plays the role of a male audio aficionado controlling and seeking to shape his sonic environment as he expresses his professional aspirations through the technology. Although positioned quite differently than the aficionados described by Stoever-Ackerman, Dixon was intervening in a long conversation about "jazz" in which black men and white men, for the most part, musicians and critics alike, argued about the music's meanings and competed with one another on an uneven playing field for power and authority. The voice letter performs a mode of masculinist empowerment in the jazz world, which included some "othered" sounds and desires and excluded others. Dixon was, after all, the one representing the collaboration with Dunn that they both described elsewhere as equal. As noted, Dunn appears only briefly on the tape, via a few bits of laughter and inaudible comments, and ultimately it is Dixon's creative and political concerns that are addressed most directly.

[63] Dixon had performed unaccompanied solos as early as 1955, but he did so with more frequency in the late 1960s. Dewar, "Searching for the Center of a Sound," 71.

[64] Dixon, *L'Opera*, 161, quoted in Dewar, "Searching for the Center of a Sound," 69.

[65] Dewar, "Searching for the Center of a Sound," 73–74; Dixon, *L'Opera*, 161; Young, *Dixonia*, 109, 114.

Through a masculinist mode of self-representation, Dixon enhances his critical power using the "grain" of his voice and the precision of his diction. He uses vocal precision to disrupt the discourse around the music. As Norie Neumark argues, "*embodied* voices are always already mediated by culture: they are inherently modified by sex, gender, ethnicity, race, history, and so on. Through its performative quality, voice does not directly express or represent those cultural characteristics, it *enacts* them. It embodies them through its vocal actions."[66] Dixon's voice, in a sense, enacts blackness, and it does not. It does so because Kofsky and anyone else listening to the recording knows it was made by an African American man who publicly claimed social and political blackness and made black music. Yet through its gravitas of tone, restricted vocal modulation, precision of diction, lack of regional accent, and avoidance of vernacular speech and colloquialisms, Dixon's voice disrupts other expectations of what a black voice sounds like and how much authority it holds. By enacting his "cultural characteristics" through a different, perhaps unexpected, mode of verbal blackness, Dixon enhances the content of his analysis, helping it to push back on the liberal critical assumption that the black musician might be a font of colloquial folk wisdom, or posses a singular, culture-bound dedication to making music, but does not possess a serious, reasoned analysis of the context of its production.

Dixon's voice, sounding "black" and "not-black," also effectively performs his broad minded commitment to black experimentalism and his troubling of the connections some radical critics were making between such experimentalism and a militant black politics. Dixon directed this recording to Frank Kofsky, a radical, rather than liberal, critic who, more than many of his contemporaries, let black musicians (some of them, at least) define the terms of the critical conversation about improvised music. He was, after all, developing the analysis of the music business offered in *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music* and elsewhere by paying attention to what musicians like Dixon, Shepp, and Taylor were saying about the political economy of jazz.[67] Yet he also butted heads with musicians during interviews over the question of the relation of "the new black music" to its political context.[68]

It is thus interesting to juxtapose Dixon's calm, precise voice with that of Kofsky. As evident in the archived 1966 interviews, Kofsky's presentation is often more intense, sometimes nervously so, and insistent when it comes to theorizing a more direct relationship between jazz and politics. As a Marxist and a fellow-traveling black nationalist, Kofsky had deep investments in experimental black music (or free jazz) as an expression of black militancy, and his voice expresses his commitment.[69]

[66] Neumark, "Doing Things With Voices: Performativity and Voice," 97.

[67] See, for example, Kofsky, *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music*, 118.

[68] Although Kofsky's political dogmatism about the music has sometimes been overstated, the tendency is evident in *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music*, in the transcription of his interview with John Coltrane contained therein, and in other interviews in the larger Kofsky collection.

[69] Kofsky's intensity of expression, of course, also likely reflected his precarious position at this moment—as a graduate student trying to make ends meet, as someone increasingly marginalized in jazz critical circles because of his conflicts with liberal critics, and as a jazz writer trying to maintain a focused embrace and celebration of an art form whose economic fortunes were in decline, as made evident by his own (and his magazine's) imminent turn to covering rock music as a way to make ends

And as the anticipated listener of a tape that, at the level of spoken content, praises his linking of music and politics, Kofsky is still the recipient of an implicit critique of his views on the politics of jazz, articulated via a particular, historically situated vocalization of black masculinity. Dixon's is a steady presence, on tape just as on the printed page, rather than a defiantly militant one as often fetishized by Kofsky. Through words and voice Dixon defines black music as a worldly, intelligent movement of practitioners often politically engaged with the world and articulate about politics, but without articulating a politics in their music in any direct, un-self-conscious sense.

Yet even with this judgment, Dixon still positions Kofsky as a different kind of critic. In the *Coda* essay Dixon recognizes the potential for a symbiotic relationship among musicians and critics, one that might even contain elements of mutual admiration. The "ideal situation, one that would benefit all, would be that [the critic] recognized his true role: the role naturally being one of a liaison between interested parties in the work of the artist and the artist himself. That kind of critic would certainly have superior knowledge about the artist's work, but he would temper his knowledge with humility and would realize the necessity of meaningful contact with the artist."[70] In the letter Dixon performs a symbiotic relationship with Kofsky that potentially emerges from the mostly homosocial, interracial community of musicians and critics. It is one structured by racial inequality and differential relationships with jazz world financial capital, but it is still one that Dixon tries to shape for his own benefit. He attempts to use Kofsky's initial offer to interview him as an occasion to generate publicity for himself and Dunn. Subsequently, in the letter's addendum, he asks Kofsky to use his influence with Rivelli to expedite the publication of their interview in *Jazz* in "as concise a way as possible," thereby benefitting him as a working musician. And he requests that Kofsky provide him with a tape of the interview and additional photographs for his ongoing project of documenting his own work.

In other words, Dixon's voice on tape situates Kofsky as a supporter and ultimately as a vehicle for making Dixon heard, initially via the *Jazz and Pop* essay and Dixon's influence on Kofsky's own writing and then, subsequently and unexpectedly, via the archive where the voice letter now rests. The tape recorder lends intimacy to the communication between the two men, and Dixon's affective language and his articulated admiration for Kofsky's writing—his "willing[ness] to speak out for those things that I think most people intrinsically know but just refuse to face"—signals respect for Kofsky's attempts to position himself as champion of and liaison for musicians, especially black musicians, and as someone whose legitimacy as a critic depends on knowing the music and the particular projects of the musicians he was writing about. In other words, Dixon gestures both through tone and semantic content toward what might be the "ideal situation" in terms of a relationship between musician and critic.

meet. For a discussion of Kofsky's career and conflicts with other critics, see John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and its Critics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), chapter 6.

[70] Dixon, "To Whom It May Concern," 9.

One can uncover yet another layer of meaning by putting Dixon's solo voice back into a collaborative, ensemblic relationship. Dixon had recently decided to change his approach to writing for and leading larger groups in order to give improvising musicians more interpretive freedom. "Up to that time," he noted later, "I was a very dictatorial writer. That's the way I thought about music—I didn't trust the players. I didn't want them doing what *they* did. . . . After [*Intents and Purposes*], I never did music like that again. I found out that [there] was another way to get it done. I began to find a way to deal with communicating with players."[71] And what better collaboration than the streets of New York? As Labelle puts it: "A site for the generative mixing and intermixing of disparity and difference, of interference, the street is an acoustical instrument for the propagation and diffusion of multiple sonorities, which the city itself comes to feedback."[72] By adding this "instrument," whether intentionally or not, Dixon brings additional critical weight and power to his spoken voice and to the themes he discusses, via the resultant, generative mixing of sound.

Going down this analytical path benefits from some thinking about the ontology of musical works, or at least those sonic texts that can be heard as music. American studies scholar Barry Shank writes: "To categorize an auditory experience as music is to make the decision that what is heard is coherent: . . . architectronic combinations of timbres, rhythms, competing and overlapping structures, auditory pressures of tension and release." He goes on to say that what distinguishes "musical beauty" from the "sonic beauty" we might appreciate in the natural or mechanical world is that the coherence of musical beauty "enables a felt connection between the sounds themselves and the social world from which they emerge." And it is this affective coherence that allows aesthetic value and political relevance to coalesce.[73]

So can one count a tape-recorded voice with ambient traffic sounds as music, or at least as musical in this sense? Voice and traffic can certainly be heard in the voice letter, both independently and together, as exhibiting coherent "combinations of timbres, rhythms, competing and overlapping structures, auditory pressures of tension and release." For example, at the point on the recording where Dixon describes the roughly 500 pieces of music he had written up to that point, with some as short as two bars, he pauses after uttering the line, "If I call that a piece of music, then that's a piece of music." The listener hears a car horn sounding along with the first mention of "a piece of music." The horn punctuates the claim but then releases to allow the listener to contemplate it. In the silence following the second mention of "piece of music," a faint screech of brakes signals a transition to

[71] Young, *Dixonia*, 111. A rather cryptic fragment of Dixon's writing in *L'Opera* may also refer to this shift: "He puts himself in the position of knowing what your instrument does, what you do, and how it can move without it all sounding like HE has done it. That's what a very hip composer does, because he doesn't want it to sound like HE has written all those parts. . . . So then, logically, the next step would be not to try to imagine how you would do it but to let you do it (by imposing the least amount on you). . . . That would be to give you blocks of things, and then let you decide on the movement then" (149).

[72] Brandon Labelle, *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life* (New York: Continuum Books, 2010), 130.

[73] Barry Shank, "The Political Agency of Musical Beauty," *American Quarterly* 63/3 (September 2011): 834.

the next two sentences, in which Dixon begins to describe this creative output: "I've also had a couple of string quartets, a couple of brass pieces, a couple of quintet, wind quintet pieces. And, in 1953 I had the first section of a symphony—dig that, will you—performed."

But how might one understand Dixon's spoken voice and the traffic sound as beautiful and social? Toward that end, a John Cage interview from the 1992 film *Écoute* offers some choice words. "When I hear what we call music, it seems to me that someone is talking, and talking about his feelings or about his ideas of relationships, but when I hear traffic, the sound of traffic, here on Sixth Avenue, for instance, I don't have the feeling that anyone is talking. I have the feeling that sound is acting, and I love the activity of sound. What it does is, it gets louder and quieter, and it gets higher and lower, and it gets longer and shorter. It does all those things. I'm completely satisfied with that. I don't need sound to talk to me."[74] Cage is distinguishing music as a product of subjective human experience and as a mode of communication, but he is also de-privileging music as the preferred mode of aestheticized sonic experience. Although he is not hearing the traffic on Sixth Avenue "talking" to him, his comments still suggest to me that it can be heard as something that is not music but which can still function like music in the right context: that is, turning back to Shank, as something that can help to convey an "experience of [or, at least, like] musical beauty [that] affectively bind[s] one's sensibilities into patterns of engagement with the social world."[75]

Dixon likely recorded the first part of the voice letter at Dunn's loft, so it may make audible the Sixth Avenue traffic that Cage heard a couple of decades later. Those sounds of Sixth Avenue (or another major New York thoroughfare), especially traffic sounds, coalesce with Dixon's voice into something performative and musical, which can be connected to Dixon's own aesthetic and critical agenda. As Dixon speaks his autobiography, discusses his work with Dunn, articulates the challenges facing the artist, and situates all of these things in New York, the rhythms, timbres, and structures of the traffic affectively speak to the listener of his social world at that moment. As they punctuate Dixon's utterances, adding a provocative layer of rhythmic, tonal, and textual counterpoint to the recording, the traffic places the listener in the loft (or possibly another New York social space that Dixon inhabits) and animates it as a part of a historically specific geography.

Piekut notes that the local geography of experimental music had "grown quite significantly" by the middle of the decade, with performers living in, working in and moving among the East Village and Lower East Side, the West Village, Midtown, the Upper West Side, and Harlem. "These geographical routes . . . ," he argues, "mirrored the expansion and transformation of the socio-aesthetic terrain upon which experimental black musicians operated."[76] As Dixon himself put it in a later reminiscence, "the music was gloriously played in painters' lofts, photographers' studios, dance studios, at parties, at almost every location (with the exception of the

[74] Miroslav Sebestik, *Écoute [Listening]* (Paris: JBA Production, 1992). Shank refers to these comments as well. See "The Political Agency of Musical Beauty," 834. *Écoute* is available on YouTube.
[75] Shank, "The Political Agency of Musical Beauty," 834.
[76] Piekut, "Race, Community, and Conflict," 192.

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by now almost 'commercial' nightclub) that you can imagine."[77] The traffic, as a mobile sonic force heard in motion on the tape, helps perform this geography. Along with his autobiographical musings, it reminds the listener that Dixon's critique and experimental aesthetic practice emerge out of evolving social *and* spatial networks going back to his youth, where he lived for a time down the block from Monroe's Uptown House on West 134th Street, which he described elsewhere as the "gathering place for some of the musicians in the vanguard of advancing the music."[78]

Dixon and Dunn's own documented performances in the late summer and fall of 1966 include those at the Judson Memorial Church in the West Village, a public school in the East Village, a concert at Hunter College on the Upper East Side, and an appearance at Charlotte Moorman's Avant-Garde Festival in Central Park. If one traces Dixon's biography forward or backward, the geography expands, and it also shows him engaged in creative and uncreative labor across the city, which did not always serve his goal of making original music. Among the "usual jobs" mentioned in the voice letter that he undertook to support himself was arranging gospel recordings for Savoy Records.[79] Ultimately, the differently voiced car and truck horns, changing volume and pitch as they move closer to or farther from the microphone, the rumble and roar of engines and axels, vibrations of engines accelerating and de-accelerating along with the vehicles, and the rhythms they produce together all speak of this movement, the flows of sociability, commerce, labor, urban development, and various forms of governmentality across the city that both facilitated and constrained creative networks at this moment.

This message becomes even clearer if one puts the sounds of the voice letter back into dialogue with Dixon's contemporaneous writings. In the *Jazz and Pop* essay, he offers an explicit mapping of New York as a contradictory and sometimes impossible site for experimental music.

> So, in New York, the city of eight million people, living in peace and harmony; the city of *Lincoln Center* and the *Guggenheim Museum*; the city of art: the ballet, painting, modern dance, sculpture, literature; New York University and Columbia University; St. Patrick's Cathedral; the Juilliard School of Music; the city where the talented and the non-talented flock to—to make it or have *it* make them; Nelson Rockefeller's city; the city where all one has to do is to aspire and the futility of the aspiration can sometimes blind, choke and deafen you with *its* indignant cries of frustration; the city of the beautiful and the ugly; the city of dreams and nightmares; the city of dirty streets and clean (when necessary) streets; the city of green grass (not to be sat upon "though") and no grass; the city where one million people live in dire poverty; the city of the police; the city of the Broadway show, the off-Broadway show and the off-off-Broadway show; the city where huge grants are given to actors for theatres in which to continue to make their make-believe; the city where only Balanchine is considered good enough to have his dances danced; this, then, is the place where the jazz

[77] Dixon, *L'Opera*, 135

[78] Dixon, *L'Opera*, vii.

[79] Young, *Dixonia*, 89–131; Benjamin Piekut, "Testing, Testing . . .: New York Experimentalism 1964," Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 2008. It is likely that two photographs of Dixon in the Kofsky Collection—one of him seated by himself outdoors; one of him playing outdoors with Marc Levin and Robin Kenyatta—are from Moorman's festival, where Levin and Kenyatta played with Dixon on 9 September as reported in Young, *Dixonia*, 104. These photographs may be among those Kofsky sent to Dixon in 1966.

> avant-garde is in residence. On any given day one can see: Cecil Taylor, Bill Dixon, Archie Shepp, Albert Ayler, Giuseppi Logan, Sun Ra, Roswell Rudd and until recently Ornette Coleman. Of course, at this writing none of them are appearing anywhere; there isn't any place to appear.[80]

With this passage in mind, Dixon's recorded voice and the traffic speak eloquently about the depth of his immersion in a social world defined by its inhabitants, its institutions, its art scene, its political power brokers, and its inequalities. It is home to "the jazz avant-garde," its inspiration, but it is also a place of difficult labors and not enough of them.

These sounds in motion also remind us that this urban matrix, the musical scenes it produces, and the modes of sustaining oneself within them were constantly in a "state of flux," as Dixon indicates in the *Coda* piece.[81] He ends the aforementioned *Jazz and Pop* passage by mentioning Coleman's recent Guggenheim award—the first accorded any "jazz" musician—pointing toward the growing, but by no means consistent or sufficient, support for experimental black music by grant-giving organizations and universities.

Some musicians addressed the challenge of keeping their experimental musical projects going by moving into, and performing in, the former industrial sites in SoHo that defined the Loft Jazz scene of the 1970s. Some participated in the self-help organization, the Collective Black Artists. But like others unable or unwilling to continue careers in New York at a moment of serious financial retrenchment and creative uncertainty, Dixon left the city. He was "almost always feeling like a stranger" in New York and, with the audience leaving the music, it was time to find a new kind of "patron" that could support the "music's development."[82] In the fall of 1968 he followed Dunn to and took a professorship at Bennington College, where he taught until 1995 as the head of the school's Black Music Division.

Ultimately, a fundamental message in all of these texts is perseverance and survival. In the *Coda* piece, Dixon acknowledges that some in the profession suffer immensely from economic hardship, critical misrepresentation, and so on, with some dying by the age of forty. Yet a devotion to music and an "even greater devotion" to one's own music remains the path forward.[83] Given that he had recently turned forty, these comments constitute a meaningful affirmation of self and community. They echo his comment about "stay[ing] alive" in the voice letter and Dunn's remarks in the *Intents and Purposes* liner notes: "The problems of musicians today are no different than those faced by artists in other fields. One seemingly effective answer is to continue working, composing, playing, dancing, teaching, speaking, writing, loving, being. Does one, in fact, have any other choice if he is to live at all?"[84]

Perhaps Dixon most wanted Kofsky, and anyone else listening in 1966, to hear his voice letter as an expression of the views of someone who, as artist and human being,

[80] Dixon, "Contemporary Jazz: an Assessment," 32.
[81] Dixon, "To Whom It May Concern," 6.
[82] Dixon, *L'Opera*, 89, 136.
[83] Dixon, "To Whom It May Concern," 2.
[84] Dunn, original liner notes, *Intents and Purposes*.

was perpetually overcoming difficulties imposed by racial inequalities, ignorance, interpersonal problems, a brutal labor market for experimental music, and so on by remaining dedicated to his art. Close to fifty years later, the voice letter calls attention to a moment in Dixon's career in need of more scrutiny and performs for its scholarly listeners, alongside Dixon's music and other writings, a sense that the criticism and musicality of socially committed, experimental black musicians of that moment constituted a linked, iterative project grounded in an evolving geography of performance and social circumstance, and carried out under conditions of both precarity and inspiration.

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