a collection of the compositions of

# ornette coleman

EDITED AND TRANSCRIBED BY GUNTHER SCHULLER





#### a COLLECTION Of tHE COMPOSITIONS Of

# ornette coleman

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#### S. F. PUBLIC LIBRARY PREFACE

This collection of compositions by Ornette Coleman is probably in certain respects one of the most unusual music publications ever undertaken. Ordinarily, publication takes place once a composer has submitted a manuscript to the publisher. Where this has not been the case, as in the case of folksong collections, for example, the music has usually been of such a simple nature (or has been so simplified by the editor) that difficulties of the kind encountered in this edition never arose.

Mr. Coleman, a controversial alto saxophonist and composer, through an undoubtedly unique set of circumstances was 'spared' conventional musical education. Despite the fact that he had played the saxophone some fifteen years before he made his first recording, Mr. Coleman never learned to read or write conventional musical notation correctly. In the history of human civilization this is, of course, not unusual. However, in the context of our Western civilization, a musician's total immunity to the notational aspect of music must be considered somewhat of an exception. And while, in the early days of jazz, non-reading improvising musicians were the rule rather than the exception, the reverse is true today, and most jazz musicians can read at least moderately well. Not so Mr. Coleman. Lest this be construed as criticism of his abilities, we wish to assure the reader that, were this the case, this publication would never have been undertaken. On the contrary, we believe it is precisely because Mr. Coleman was not 'handicapped' by conventional music education that he has been able to make his unique contribution to contemporary music.

The specific problems of notating these compositions arise from the fact that the 'leadsheets' submitted by Mr. Coleman, written in a highly 'personal' notation, rarely coincided rhythmically with his own performances of these works. The editor, therefore, was forced to transcribe them from Mr. Coleman's recordings. A further complication arose at this point, since in those instances, where the rhythmic notation was not unmistakably clear, Mr. Coleman was unable to verify one way or another the editor's particular choices.

It must therefore be emphasized that while every effort at accuracy has been made, the editor cannot claim to have solved every notational problem unequivocally.

Notation is in many ways based on arbitrary decisions by the composer (for example whether to notate a piece at J=126 or J=126). Similarly, in this edition, lacking of necessity the authority of the composer's personal choice, arbitrary decisions had to be made by the editor. However, we believe they are limited to instances where the recorded performance was itself not definitive enough to arrive at an unequivocal choice. The paradox of the situation is that a composer's performance of his own music is unquestionably a more direct and accurate source of his intentions than his notation of the same music could ever be. However, for the publisher, who obviously cannot exist without notation, the recording by itself—no matter how authoritative—lacks the composer's written corroboration of his performance.

To complicate matters more, there are certain variables in the recorded performances of Mr. Coleman's works with respect to tempos, meters and chord progressions, not only within a given piece, but from performance to performance, so that the editor was unable to check his notational choices against live performances.

In Mr. Coleman's world, where freedom and constant variation are the main guiding principles, it is not at all unusual that an improvised phrase, which on its first appearance consists of six bars, turns out to be eight the next time and perhaps nine still later. The chord progressions (or 'changes') upon which the improvisations are based are often only loosely related to the composition, at other times relate only to part of the written section, and in any case are not always strictly adhered to. (See discussion of Congeniality below). In Lonely Woman another type of performance variability occurs: in this piece only the drums keep a strict tempo, while alto and trumpet (in an 'improvised' unison) and the bass play not only at different tempos, but within these tempos quite freely (rubato).

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These structural and harmonic liberties have led some observers to conclude that Mr. Coleman's music is chaotic and formless. But even a perfunctory glance at the ten compositions in this book will indicate that this is not the case. In fact, the pyramid-like form of Focus on Sanity, with its related tempo levels; the ingenious meter relationships of Una Muy Bonita; the simple yet original formal designs of all the other pieces, would indicate that Mr. Coleman's music is anything but chaotic. The originality of these compositions is all the more startling when one remembers that they are not the product of book learning or conventional musical education, but instead intuitive creations, whose genuineness is for this reason alone unassailable.

It has also been said that Ornette Coleman is a fine composer but a poor improviser. The inference is that, because he rarely adheres to conventional chord or phrase patterns, he is incapable of doing so, and that therefore his improvisations are 'fraudulent' or at best 'disorganized' and 'meaningless.' For this reason the editor has included one of Mr. Coleman's improvisations (Congeniality) to place before the unprejudiced musician an example of this alleged 'incoherence'.

Aside from such melodic relationships, there are many indications in Mr. Coleman's harmonic patterns that 'he knows what he's doing.' He is basically a modal player, a point which underscores how far back his musical roots reach. An analysis of the harmonic progression seemingly implied by his solo in Congeniality indicates clearly that Mr. Coleman does not veer much from the basic key of B-flat, - and then most often only to the next step of C minor. Excursions into other keys (like D-flat and B-natural) are rare and momentary, and all follow more or less the same pattern. The sequence D-flat, B-natural, C-minor to B-flat, for example, occurs three times (see measures 10, 56 and 160), - surely not mere accident. Analysis of other improvisations by Mr. Coleman indicate that he, like many other jazz artists, past and present, has found a way of making the tonic and one other step in the key serve for most of his solo: in this case the adherence to B-flat and C-minor, a combination (I and II) he seems to prefer above all others, probably because II includes most of the important notes of the dominant (V) and sub-dominant (IV). It is also obvious from the long stretches of B-flat tonic, mostly centering around the beginnings of what appear to be larger phrase structures, that Mr. Coleman is fully aware of his place in the over-all formal design at any given moment. That this structure need not necessarily consist of eight-bar units, or indeed of any particular unit length, is one of Mr. Coleman's fundamental departures from previous practices. In this connection his own statement made in 1958 is revealing: "I would prefer it if musicians would play my tunes with different changes as they take a new chorus, so that there'd be all the more variety in the performance."

Since Mr. Coleman's quartet does not employ a piano, the bassist is free to build long melodic lines which are based on a purely intuitive, reflexive reaction to Mr. Coleman's playing, who in turn responds in kind to the bass, so that a kind of continuous contrapuntal exchange is established. This explains why Charles Haden's bass lines do not always match bar for bar Mr. Coleman's harmonic patterns. Rather than mesh perfectly, they have about each other leaving both players free to strike out on new paths at the right moment, and pull the other one with him. This process is really the essence of collective improvisation, and is seen in a new light in the work of Mr. Coleman's quartet.

Because the improvised bass part under the alto solo in **Congeniality** does not function merely in terms of harmonic roots, but moves rather as a melodically free agent, the editor felt that its inclusion would serve no purpose in explaining Mr. Coleman's improvisation, and might, therefore, confuse those who are used to viewing music only harmonically and vertically.

From our harmonic analysis (based on its horizontal continuity) it can be seen that Mr. Coleman's work, which has often been characterized as 'atonal,' is in the strictest sense not that at all,—cetrainly not in its orientation. 'Free' in this context seems to be too readily confused with 'atonal.' What does happen, however, is that both alto and bass may move at a particular moment into divergent keys, thus giving the impression momentarily of a pan-tonal or atonal texture.

There remains to be discussed the curious 3/4 and 5/4 meters before and after letter F. In bar 121 motive d is altered to produce an unexpected polymetric pattern with the bass. At the conclusion of this phrase (bar 127) whether by accident or intent, Mr. Coleman starts a new phrase which is one beat off from the rhythm section. Now it is easy to assume that Mr. Coleman erred in his entrance. Yet this kind of polymetric displacement is the heart and soul of one of the primary antecedents of jazz, namely native African music, and is certainly not unknown in jazz improvisation. It is conceivable then that Mr. Coleman instinctively and deliberately made this choice, especially in as much as he likes to "turn phrases around on a different beat, thereby raising the freedom of my playing."

In the ensuing five bars Mr. Coleman heard that his rhythm section was beginning to grow wobbly under him. He accordingly stretched the next bar into a 5/4 bar, thus making up for the previously missing beat, In the meantime bass and drums, however, had begun to switch their beat, which was accomplished by bar 136. Mr. Coleman, now back in his original beat pattern, once more found himself at odds with the rhythm section. It took another 3/4 bar (142) to right things once again. This curious bit of metric interchange may have been accidental; one's conclusion can be no more than an interpretation, and therefore not really conclusive. However, it is this kind of rhythmic freedom which Mr. Coleman and other young players are striving for, and this example may well be an authentic forecast of things to come.

All chord symbols are additions of the editor and are to be taken merely as suggestions, in an attempt to give this collection greater practical value. Occasionally Mr. Haden's bass lines have been notated in small print, and in view of the above-outlined approach of the players, these bass lines do not always conform to indicated chord symbols. Interested players are, of course, at liberty to create their own improvised lines. Since this collection contains what are in effect condensed scores, alto and trumpet are both notated at actual sounding pitch. Parts would have to be transposed.

In general, it should be remembered that in view of the fact that jazz is largely an improvised music, in which the personal interpretation takes precedence over the composition, these scores were intended to serve only as a moderately detailed outline to help the student, music lover and aficionado.

GUNTHER SCHULLER New York, July, 1961

All the works in this collection have been recorded by Mr. Coleman's quartet on two Atlantic LP's (ATL 1317 and 1327).

#### **FORERUNNER**







\* The length of these solos is optional.



#### CONGENIALITY

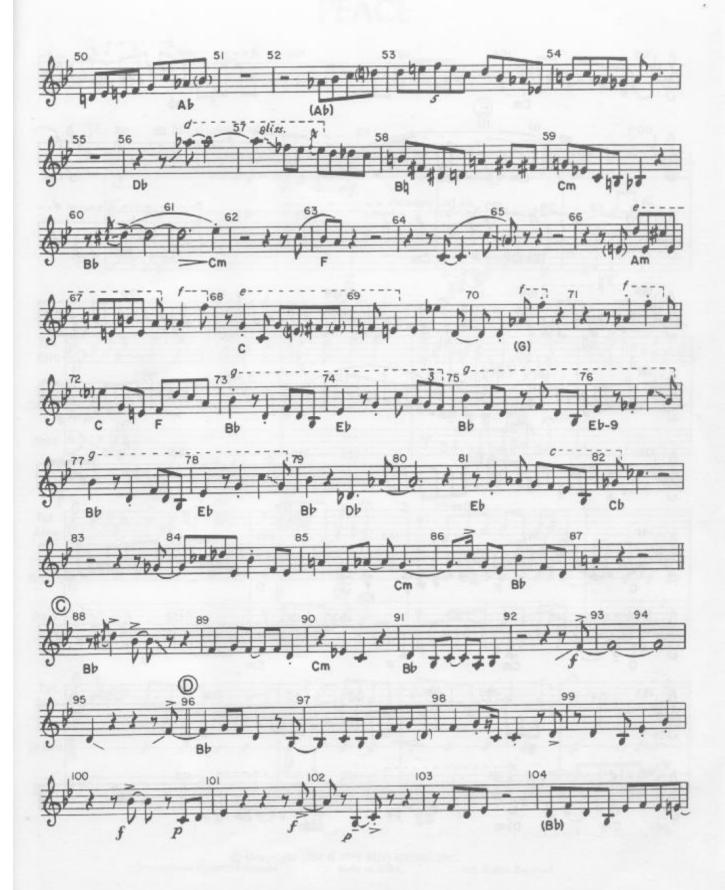


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#### **PEACE**



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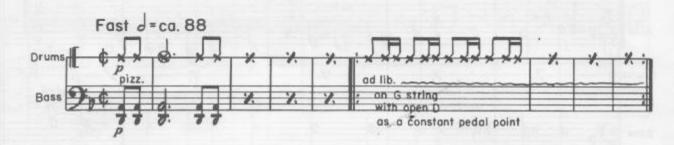


#### **FREE**



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### LONELY WOMAN







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## FACE OF THE BASS





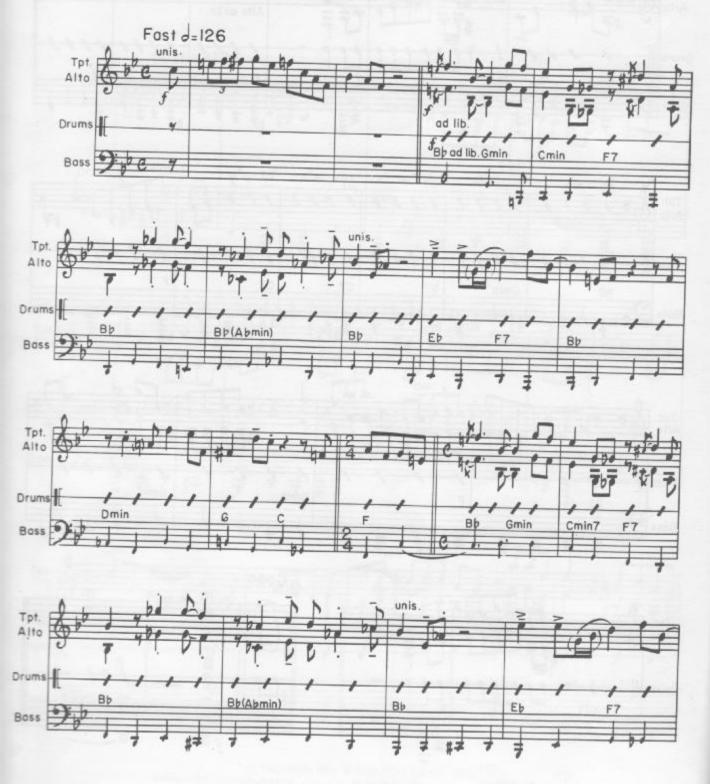
## CHRONOLOGY



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# BIRD FOOD





#### FOCUS ON SANITY









#### UNA MUY BONITA









Scores:

John Lewis Sketch for Double Quartet

Gunther Schuller Concertino for Jazz Quartet and Orchestra

Gunther Schuller Conversations for Jazz Quartet and

**String Quartet** 

Charles Ives Chromâtimelôdtune (Reconstructed and

completed by Gunther Schuller)

J. J. Johnson Poem for Brass

John Lewis The Golden Striker

(for Solo Piano, Bass and Drums)

Andre Hodeir Around the Blues (Jazz Quartet and Orchestra)

John Lewis Excerpts from The Comedy

(Suite for Solo Piano, Brass, Bass and Drums)

Andre Hodeir Osymetrios (Jazz Combo)

Andre Hodeir Trope A Saint-Trop (Jazz Combo)

James Giuffre Pharoah (Music for Brass)

Werner Heider Divertimento (Jazz Quartet and Orchestra)

Hall Overton Sonorities for Orchestra

Leander Dell 'Anno Three Short Piano Pieces

IN PREPARATION - JAZZ THEMES WITH IMPROVISATIONS SERIES

of JOHN LEWIS (Piano)
of MILT JACKSON (Vibes)
of JIMMY HEATH (Saxophone)

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