OFF THE BEAT:

History and Analysis of Selected Jazz/Poetry Collaborations (1956-1959)

by

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By: Alexander Gelles Ariff

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Jazz music and spoken poetry evoke the aurality of the moment. They cannot be rewound, or redone the way we can re-read a poem or rehearse a piece of music. The poem, in its form on the page, is not the purpose of this examination. Between 1957 and 1959, there was a movement to synthesize live jazz with spoken poetry, in turn creating a new art form. This thesis seeks to expose, examine and analyze the simultaneous synthesis of spoken poetry and performed music.

The literary world often defines “jazz poetry” as poetry influenced by jazz music or a poem containing jazz’s historical themes. On the musical side of the spectrum, performers and composers can also convey poetic or literary devices within sonic space. These can be as obvious as inserting a humorous quote like “pop goes the weasel” into an improvised solo. Where as literary scholars have focused on the broad responses to jazz as poetic inspiration, my study will shine light on how the jazz musician relates and responds to the poet and performance. Chapter 1: A History of Jazz/Poetry reveals individual narratives of two separate but connected scenes, one in San Francisco and the other New York City. I compile commentary and timeline information of selected collaborations using cited live performances and recording sessions as pinpoints.

Chapter 2: Recordings and Analysis relies on transcription of spoken voice against solo instrumental accompaniment. I take a uniform approach to analyzing
jazz/poetry recordings by adopting my own system of labeling based on musical
responses to poetry. Chapter 2 also tells the story of my trip to Calabasas, California to
visit and recover original, handwritten scores by Allyn Ferguson for his jazz/poetry
album with poet Kenneth Patchen. Analyzing the poet’s level of interaction with music as
the springboard, we can (choose to) listen to jazz/poetry recordings with bigger ears.

Chapter 3: *Interviews* is centered on two interviews: pianist/composer Vijay Iyer
and poet/producer Mike Ladd. Chapter 3 also contains excerpts from various interviews I
have conducted since I first began researching jazz/poetry in May 2010.
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Introduction: Setting The Stage

Until [either] the musicians learn to think in poets’ structures of thought … or poets write poetry in the format of songs-to be recited against 4/4 time … there will be difficulties. With practice and planning it could be that these men will effect a merger of these two forms of expression into a third form which will be neither on nor the other but, perhaps, something greater than the sum of both…it is a fascinating experiment to watch.¹

-Ralph Gleason, 1957

Finding a precise definition of jazz poetry isn’t any easier than defining the two arts individually. Once jazz music had earned its place in popular culture discourse, the music was seen thereafter as a democratic art and the fluid personal voice of the current musician, living for the moment and living in the moment. Many poets influenced by jazz hold places in publications like The Jazz Poetry Anthology, Jazz Poems, and Moments Notice. The history of the performance of jazz/poetry is as much as a musical history, as it is a literary genre. Jazz/poetry includes numerous influences, but this history seeks to observe it strictly as a musical energy; a real time transference, from oral traditions to aural absorption.

The beat movement is a great entry point into how the aesthetics of jazz/poetry grew. In Blows Like a Horn, Preston Whaley Jr. depicts the atmosphere well, writing that “places like Monroe’s and Minton’s were bastions of experimentation, improvisation, and community, as was backstage, on the bus, or late hours in hotel rooms where jazz players could play and exchange notes freely.”² The lower Manhattan social network welcomed and nurtured a jazz scene that included clubs like The Half Note, The Five Spot Café and

¹ Gleason “Perspectives,” 32.
The Village Vanguard. At the same time, on the West Coast, the legendary Black Hawk club, located in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco, would feature some of the era’s most renounced jazz musicians. All of the prestigious clubs just mentioned, at one point or another, offered jazz/poetry synthesis.

By the late 1950s, specifically in New York City and San Francisco, jazz had spilled over into practically all of bohemian culture aesthetics including fashion, film, writing, visual art, and mixed performance contexts. The print media often reflected on tumultuous public attitudes surrounding “beatnik” culture. In September 1957, Life magazine published an article entitled “Big Day for Bards at Bay.” The feature illuminates the surge of new multi-cultural and cross-pollinating artistic expression. The “bards” were the poets working within the San Francisco Bay Area, and Life presented profiles of such writers as Allen Ginsberg, Michael McClure, and Bill Everson; reported on the Howl obscenity trial and Lawrence Ferlinghetti outside the courtroom presenting his poetry while a woman performed a mock-striptease; a concert report Gerd Stern, a white poet, reading his “Interlude for Dancer” while black male dancer Zack Thompson performs to an nearly all-white audience; and a concert report (with photographs) of Kenneth Rexroth reading poetry with jazz to a packed house at The Blackhawk. Published commentary provides the necessary context into perceiving lives of the poets and musicians collaborating on either coast.

While Langston Hughes resided within Harlem’s (jazz) renaissance, (white poets) Jack Kerouac, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Kenneth Patchen and Kenneth Rexroth approached the music as outsiders. Regardless of race, in all jazz/poetry presentations, one can hear, to one degree or another, an affinity with the sound of bebop, swing and blues; audible
replications of the music’s groove, timbre, tempo, licks, clichés, accents, and rhythm. The beats wanted to transfer the feel of jazz into their work. Some scholars look back on the beats as “consuming” and “seizing” African American style, and in turn “enacted its influence through their art.”³ But before accusations are tossed around, I’d prefer to take a step back, and zoom out in order to focus on the purpose and events surrounding early jazz and poetry collaborations. This discussion will suspend the discourse of motives surrounding racial politics during the beat movement. The economics of 1957 read that: the poet needed an audience to recite, they saw jazz as a medium, to both expose more people to their art and to “enhance” their words.

³ Preston Whaley, Jr., Blows Like a Horn, 5.
Chapter 1: A History of Jazz/Poetry

Part 1: The Breeding Ground and Rexroth

The unsung pioneer poet of the “beat” branch of the jazz/poetry movement may be ruth weiss (name spelled entirely lowercase). weiss, a female poet who was never recorded with jazz, has a trajectory that lands her engaged and contributing to east and west coast jazz/poetry scenes. In 1948, weiss got her start at the Art Circle on the near north side of Chicago. Inside its dimly lit ambiance, weiss heard the “distinct sound of bebop,” and read her poetry to the very same audiences. In 1949, an African American painter named Ernest Alexander asked her to read with the Art Circle jazz ensemble, and later that year she moved to Greenwich Village, New York where she intermingled with writers such as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Bob Kaufman, William S. Burroughs, and John Clellon Holmes. She never recorded with jazz music, but this does not exclude her participation in the jazz/poetry genre’s development. Additional poets during this period and into the 50s that never recorded but are said to have performed with jazz at The Five Spot in New York City include Frank O’Hara and Kenneth Koch. In 1952, ruth weiss, at age 24, went to San Francisco, where she participated in what is now referred to as The San Francisco Poetry Renaissance. In 1956, drummer Sonny Nelson opened up The Cellar cafe in North Beach, a section of San Francisco just above Chinatown. Located on 576 Green Street, The Cellar became an epicenter of jazz/poetry experimentation. In addition to Kenneth Rexorth and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, ruth weiss read her poetry there

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with accompaniment by pianist Boo Pleasant. “She was a big part of it, believe me. The experiment took off. We had huge crowds,” said Sonny Nelson. Locals came to hear the sessions and soon, so did celebrities such as Lenny Bruce, Dizzy Gillespie, widely read local critic Ralph Gleason, Charles Mingus, and William Carlos Williams.  

From its inception, jazz/poetry received skepticism. The collaborations at The Cellar were not entirely well received; many critics sat puzzled, while poets passionately took their work off the page, and onto the stage. Media outlets like *Time* magazine held were blunt in their reports that the “poetry was usually poor and the jazz was worse, but nobody seemed to care.” *Jazz Monthly*’s scope was more horizontal. The publication linked the convergence of live jazz and poetry with a divergence within their own respective communities; jazz away from the masses by way of bebop, and poetry’s new

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6 Preston Whaley Jr., *Blows Like a Horn*, 12.
voice as a social commentary on 1950s America. By the late 50s, popular music was shifting to more electric music and the jazz industry was thirsty for an audience. Rock and roll was on the rise, and jazzmen needed gigs. Club owners began to get creative; it wasn’t strange for a club like the Half Note in New York to alternate jazz with a group of Greenwich Village actors.

In 1957, Ralph Gleason wrote two drastically different articles in *Down Beat* concerning jazz/poetry. Between May and November, Gleason gave a bit of his time to the new art by writing liner notes and attending many jazz/poetry performances. By the end of the year, his scope had narrowed from curious excitement to calling jazz/poetry a “freak, like a two headed calf”. How Gleason arrived to this conclusion can perhaps be attributed to the following factors: venue ambiance, poet performance and overall musicianship.

The critic covered the poet Kenneth Rexroth on two separate gigs at two clubs: The Cellar and The Black Hawk. Kenneth Rexroth and Lawrence Ferlinghetti (*City Lights* Publishing) had a collaboration with a house band consisting of Bruce Lippincott, tenor sax, director; Bill Wiejans, piano; Sonny Wayne, drums; Jerry Good, bass; and both Dickie Mills and Mike Downs on trumpet. The poets and The CellarJazz Quintet improvised to the packed club; at capacity it held 43 people. The sessions were “a natural result of the continued cultural turbulence” associated with Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl* and Kerouac’s *On the Road*. The two poets were regulars at The Cellar, often

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12 The 2010 film *Howl* portrays a reading session similar to the ambiance described at The Cellar. The opening scene is set in a dimly lit room with brick walls. Mostly white male and females in glasses sit in the audience, some drag on cigarettes, and as homage to Kerouac’s drink of choice, a young man takes a
reading poems with jazz. Ferlinghetti recalls reciting the poem “Dog” and other works from his book “Coney Island on the Mind” with the jazz at The Cellar.\footnote{S. E. Gontarski, The Review of Contemporary Fiction, 10, 3 (1990): 8, 132–135.} A recording of one particular performance was captured and released on Fantasy aptly titled *Poetry Readings in “The Cellar.”* At the session, Ferlinghetti read three poems: “Statue of St. Francis,” “Autobiography,” and “Junkman’s Obbligato,” while Rexroth read one, twenty minute, four-part lament poem in memory of Dylan Thomas entitled “Thou Shalt Not Kill.”\footnote{Thomas passed away in 1953; Rexroth was 9 years his senior.} The poet’s delivery is a passionate, fierce monotone. The musical accompaniment follows the poems sections, containing four distinct arrangements of instrumentation and/or musical texture. Ralph Gleason was impressed, calling it “a powerful written indictment of the culture of the United States today” that “came off spectacularly well and reached the audience at levels with considerable emotion.”\footnote{Gleason “Perspectives,” May 1957, 32.}

The arena and audience plays a critical role in all performing art, and jazz/poetry was no different. Although Rexroth was of the generation prior the beats, the crowd notably can relate to his and Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s frustration, humor and satire. Before Rexroth captivated the North Beach scene in the 1950s, he was listening to Langston Hughes read with jazz and testing out his own jazz/poetry voice in Chicago in the 1930s.\footnote{“Kenneth Rexroth,” The San Francisco Poets, ed. David Melzter (New York, 1971), p. 23.} He was in his element reading with a band. “Thou Shalt Not Kill,” the poem, contains content that allowed for his performance to fuse with The Cellar’s atmosphere. The ambience was the perfect blend for Rexroth to forfeit delicacy, and deliver! Rexroth attempted to apply to the lyric the same freedom that modern jazz has applied to

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improvisation, but his recitation served more as a catalyst or conductor than a player in
the band. Rexroth wanted to “return the poet to his audience” by exposing the
“fundamental similarity between jazz rhythms and the rhythms of modern poetry.”\textsuperscript{17}
Saxophonist Bruce Lippincott reflected that the concept was a different approach to jazz;
he called it “…responding—not in a preordained way—but in a kind of question and
answer—sort of relative pitch way…the music becomes visual and broader…it has new
dimension.”\textsuperscript{18} Lippincott is noted as having once recited a poem on “how the guy in the
combo feels when he is going way out.”\textsuperscript{19} In an interview with Dickie Mills, the
trumpeter recalls:

We played a couple of tunes before the hit, we were working there. The
poet would start to arrive, and the people who came to hear the poets
arrived, then we would start to a poem. In the case of Ferlinghetti’s, it was
much easier to do than Rexroth. We used an “I’ve Got Rhythm” as the
basis, we played around, [trading] 4s with each other and with the poet,
Ferlinghetti We found very easy, it was right in our genre, so there was
very little rehearsal. “Junkman’s Obbligato” was one that really came
about on its own, that was one of the more successful ones.\textsuperscript{20}

\begin{center}
\textit{Photograph of Dick Mills, courtesy of the artist.}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{17} Ralph J. Gleason, liner notes to Kenneth Rexroth, \textit{Poetry Readings in “The Cellar”}, Fantasy 7002, 1956,
LP.
\textsuperscript{18} Bruce Lippincott’s instructional essay entitled “Aspects of the Jam Session,” published in 1958, is
worthy of investigation. It appears in Ralph Gleason (ed.) \textit{Jam Session: An Anthology of Jazz} (New York:
\textsuperscript{19} Alexander, “The Cool”, 70.
\textsuperscript{20} Dickie Mills, interview by the author, September 23 2012, New York digital recording from telephone
interview.
Rexroth also executed and captured a live jazz/poetry gig, and released it on *Fantasy* with commentary liner notes the poet wrote himself. Unlike The Cellar sessions, *At the Blackhawk* (Fantasy, 1958) was Rexroth’s exclusive bill. The only member from The Cellar group that continued to play with Rexroth was Dick Mills, the rest of the band featured: Brue Moore, tenor saxophone; Clare Willie, piano; Josh Hosher, bass; and Gus Gusterson, drums. *At the Blackhawk* is mixture of original compositions by Mills and standards that the band didn’t need to rehearse; for example, the poem “Married Blues” is supported by a head arrangement of Mercer Ellington’s “Things ‘Aint What It Used To Be.” For Rexroth’s short love poem entitled “Quietly,” Mills plays with the content within the line “…the calm music of Bacharini” by writing a four bar, three part polyphony performed with each entrance dispersed like that of a cannon; the order is Mills, Hosher, Moore. Mills improvises the entire duration of the tune, first beginning with finely articulated phrases, shifting around using chromaticism and eventually playing in a swing feel for a brief instance, keeping his tonal center around the key of C minor. Mills remembers the session and its aftermath, the two had a short-lived working relationship.

The reading at the Blackhawk, we rehearsed a lot of these tunes, we got standard tunes that we thought were apt, tunes….both *Life* and *Time* magazines did a thing on it. There’s a picture that was in Life magazine, you can see the band, two of the horns playing, and a full view of Rexroth emoting, which he did! I’m not demeaning him, I don’t mean to do that. He was a very pompous man.

Nonetheless, Rexroth was a success. He closed out the year by traveling down from the Bay Area to L.A to headline the West Coast Poetry and Jazz Festival. An image

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21 Ridolfo Luigi Boccherini was an Italian composer from the late 17th century.
22 Dickie Mills, interview by the author, September 23 2012, New York digital recording from telephone interview.
of the program appears in the Appendix. The festival was more of a concert series—daily
two hour shows held from Wednesday December 4 through Saturday December 7—at the
Los Angeles Concert Hall on 3020 Crenshaw Blvd in Hollywood. It was a big event; the
hall had only been open in June for the four-week season, and this would be a celebratory
season opener. Benny Carter, who performed and co-produced the concert, appeared on
the ABC’s Hank Weaver Show in late November 1957 to promote the show. When
Weaver asks Carter about it, Carter prefices with “how shall I say this?” and, after a
pause, describes that with the season is “opening with sort of a poetry and jazz thing,
which is the new thing that’s been so successful in San Francisco and in the East…we’re
featuring Shorty Rogers and the Giants, a great band, and Fred Katz and his quartet, and
we’re having Kenneth Rexroth, who is the sort of the modern day Walt Whitman to a lot
of people, come down and he’s going to spend four days with us and he’s going to read
some of his poetry.” Weaver follows up with “also, I believe that’s a tribute to Dylan
Thomas, a great poet,” mispronouncing Dylan [die-lynn] referencing an article in the
latest issue of Esquire featuring the poet.23

Reporter George Lane from Metronome was on the scene to cover the festival. He
heard Rexroth reading with Shorty Rogers, flugelhorn; Bill Holman, tenor; Ralph Pena,
bass; and Larry Bunker, drums. Lane was particularly moved when the Rexroth read
solely with two bassists: Pena and special guest Red Mitchell.24 He stated that that
Rexroth premiered a performance of “For This Night Only” with pianist Marty Paich.

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Weaver, November 25 1957, Los Angeles, audio from TV broadcast.
24 George Lane, “Jazz and Poetry”, Metronome, February 1958, 44.
The poet performed the poem first, unaccompanied, then with the pianist. Fred Katz, another performer in the festival, stated that in jazz/poetry, he improvised to “new thoughts.”

In 1958, Kenneth Rexroth traveled to The Crystal Palace in St. Louis for 9-day stint featuring The Jimmy Williams Trio: Williams, piano; Ron Ruff, tenor and flute; and Boris Anastaoff, bass. *Metronome* reported that the performance was well received, that the music was “great background,” but thought Rexroth’s delivery was lacking “emotional embroidery.” He also reported that the musicians were reading the poem, not sheet music, on the bandstand. That same year, Rexroth is also cited as having “knocked out the poetry fans…but [he] lost the jazz buffs” sharing the stage with Pepper Adam’s band. No other reported performances or recordings appear in my research, but Rexroth did, however, publish two worthwhile articles in addition to the one in *Esquire*, on his commentary on jazz and poetry inside *The Nation* and the *Village Voice.*

**Part 2: Kenneth Patchen: The “First” and the “Best”**

Kenneth Patchen (December 13, 1911 – January 8, 1972) may have executed “the truest union of poetry and jazz.” Barry Wallenstein summarizes the aesthetic: “Patchen had a good sense of music, he knew how to read with the music, he took it seriously to

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25 Barry Wallenstein, a practicing jazz/poet since 1972, uses this tactic. A special interest is his performance of poetry with jazz collaboration. He has made six recordings of his poetry with jazz, the most recent being *Euphoria Ripens* [Cadence Jazz Records] April, 2008.
26 George Lane, “Jazz and Poetry,” 44.
28 The article in *The Nation* is from the issue *The Nation* 186, 29 March 1958, 282-283. It was reprinted in *World Outside the Window: Selected Essays of Kenneth Rexroth* (New Directions, 1987). Rexroth was visiting NYC around April 1958, and performing with jazz, when he approached the *Village Voice* about submitting a letter; his article was published in the publication’s April 23, 1958 issue.
listen, and they [the musicians] listen well to him. That’s what it’s all about. The successful examples of this fusion are all about both parties listening.”  

Patchen became exposed to jazz and fell in love with it while studying at Stanford. His first readings are said to have been in 1950, tapes were circulated on the radio in US and Canada. Beginning in October 1957, Patchen was presenting his own take on jazz/poetry, appearing twice a night—three shows on the weekends—at the Black Hawk with the Chamber Jazz Sextet directed by Allyn Ferguson. The band featured Ferguson on piano and French horn; Frank Leal, alto saxophone; Modesto Briseno, tenor and baritone saxophone, clarinet; Robert Wilson, trumpet, percussion; Fred Dutton, bass and bassoon; Tom Reynolds; drums and tympani.  

The first noted performance with Ferguson and Patchen’s collaborative was on October 1, 1957 at San Francisco’s Black Hawk Club. This event was successful and they were first double billed with Art Pepper and Dave Brubeck. A review in the *Oakland Tribune* (October 5, 1957) reported that Patchen’s performance on October 3rd at the Back Hawk was success. He performed for around “400 persons, many of whom apparently were in a jazz club for the first time, was respectfully attentive and enthusiastically applauded,” the article continues stating that Patchen’s “poetry combined delicacy and disorganization,” and was “rebellious and ribald, occasionally savage…[with] nuances of the horror and happiness,” the overall presentation was “vivid” hitting with “a mighty impact.”

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30 Barry Wallenstien, interview by the author, 4 October 2012, New York, digital recording.  
32 Fred Dutton also served as the contra bassoon player in the L.A Philharmonic.  
The owner of the Black Hawk, Guido Cacianti was impressed with the success for the performance and saw prospective success for jazz/poetry as a genre. Patchen wore a wine colored tux jacket with a white shirt, presenting his poems to a packed audience atop a palette of carefully plotted musical arrangements. Patchen’s objective, unlike Bruce Lippincott’s free form jazz, was to allow the music to “fortify the emotional material of the poetry.”

![Image](https://example.com/ad_clipping.jpg)

Ad clipping from the *Oakland Tribune, October 5 1957, 11.*

According to Patchen biographer, Larry Smith, Patchen “pioneered the business of reading poetry to jazz with a series of tapes dating back to 1950.” Patchen first began working with Allyn Ferguson in 1957, while Ferguson was a Stanford University student. Ferguson’s compositions at this point in his career were “third stream,” modern, classical jazz. *Kenneth Patchen Reads with Allyn Ferguson and the Chamber Jazz Sextet* (1957) was recorded/constructed on three separate recordings dates similar to that of a film score; the first session was used to track Patchen’s voice a capella, the second was used

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34 Ibid.
35 Gleason, “Perspectives,” May, 1957, 32.
36 Allyn Ferguson, Liner notes to *Kenneth Patchen*, LP.
to track the music that Ferguson had carefully scored. The third and final session included Patchen re-reading atop the music. Contrary to the more ambiguous musical approach at The Cellar sessions, Patchen and Ferguson cared most about presenting a unified art. Ferguson conceived the sextet “with the purpose of synthesizing jazz and ‘serious music’,” writing that the group used “the tools of jazz to the utmost” including “the instruments basic to the jazz medium, musicians well schooled in the phrasings and interpretations, compositions and arrangements calculated to take full advantage of contemporary jazz sounds and techniques.” Ralph Gleason, however, believed that jazz/poetry needed to progress to where the musician’s brain is intertwined with the poet’s brain, keeping the arts on an equal plane.

In almost any alley in San Francisco these nights you can see a bearded bard reading his quatrains while a couple of cats like blow… Most the poets are slumming… They’re re-cashing in on the jazz audience but they won’t learn anything about jazz or listen to it or try to allow the natural jazz rhythms they have to come out… Everybody is asking the poets what they think about jazz. Not what does the jazz man think about poetry. The entire thing is being done from a point of view, which places poetry above jazz in this situation, and I don’t believe its right for a minute… not until a poet comes along who learns what jazz is all about and then writes poetry will there be any merger.

Around this time, the group performed at Fack’s II, a San Francisco supper club on 960 Bush Street, and the audience talked throughout the performance, treating their “serious” art like background music.

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38 Original scores appear in Appendix, analysis in Chapter 2.
39 Allyn Ferguson, liner notes to Kenneth Patchen, LP.
40 Gleason, “Perspectives,” May, 1957, 32.
Nonetheless, Patchen claimed to be “the creator—and still the undisputed champ—of the exciting new art medium, ‘Poetry-Jazz’.” Smith claims that Patchen’s collaborations were the only true synthesis of the art forms into something new. In November 1957, Patchen played in Oakland and Los Angeles and was performing bi-nightly at the LA Jazz Concert Hall. Into 1958, the ensemble continued to play in Los Angeles, performing on February 25, 1958 at Royce Hall Auditorium at UCLA; a three-week run at the Cabaret Concert Theater, and the Los Angeles City College. Later that summer they would make their international debut at the Brussels World Fair.\(^\text{42}\)

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On July 28, 1958 they appeared on in primetime on KABC-TV’s *Stars of Jazz* hosted by Bobby Troupe. They performed two poems, “And With the Sorrows of this Joyousness,” and “Do The Dead Know What Time It Is.” In a *Down Beat* spot regarding the appearance, Patchen and Ferguson differentiated their craft with the other improvisers of the bay area dignifying that “…worthwhile poetry and jazz must be written and re-written, played and re-replayed, rehearsed and re-rehearsed.” The *New York Times* appeared unimpressed, reporting that the “rather zed affair” was “a somber pursuit of mood that ended with all concert sitting on their art,” and continued by stating

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43 I derived this from two sources: the first poem appears in the *New York Times* review, in an interview with the author, David Sherr recalled seeing the performance of the second poem.

that “one of [Allyn Ferguson’s] chores was to find the notes that would help Mr. Patchen reach the inevitable climax of zeals in unsayable zones.”

It’s at this time that some of the publications form a taste for what jazz/poetry they prefer. *Jazz Monthly* praised Kenneth Patchen’s ability to avoid of the “pseudo-intellectual approach” calling him “undoubtedly one of the few contemporary writers of great stature” and questioned the political motives behind the poets such as Rexroth.

[Some poets] are inspired by only a vague socialist outlook combined with liberal ideas which, at rock bottom, is nothing more than the old mixture in a slightly different presentation. If, after much shouting and heady prose or verse, we are then extolled to join the Labor Party, I can only suggest that the writers are wasting both their own and our time.

On February 12, 1959 Patchen teamed up with the Alan Neil Quartet with Al Neil, piano; Dale Hillary, alto; Bill Boyle, drums; Lionel Chambers, bass. Patchen rehearsed with the band twice before they embarked on a mini-tour: Vancouver’s Cellar Club, the Arts Club, University of British Columbia and on TV for the CBC throughout the tour. On February 18, they band performed for a Montreal radio to broadcasted in October 1959 and later released it on Folkways as *Kenneth Patchen Reads with Jazz in Canada*. Allan Neil accounts the day of the session in a great essay that appears in the liner notes recalling how Patchen had chipped a tooth and received oral surgery the day of the recording session. The tour continued to Seattle where Patchen worked with Johnny Wittwer’s group, The New Bed of Roses Chamber Jazz Group.

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48 Johnny Wittwer’s performance guide cues, key changes, musical notations, and a set of note cards containing hand written notes by both Patchen and Wittwer are located at the UCSC Special Collection, Johnny Wittwer Papers, 1959. Alan Neil, liner notes to Kenneth Patchen, *Kenneth Patchen Reads with Jazz in Canada*, Folkways Records FL9718, 1959.
Patchen stands outside the Half Note with Mingus’s tenor saxophonist, Booker Ervin; photographer unknown.

A photo of Patchen with the Charles Mingus Band, photographer and venue unknown, property of the University of Minnesota.

The last two weeks of March, 1959, Patchen was in New York City working with Charles Mingus. Mingus summarizes Patchen as a “real artist,” but deep examination into Patchen’s correspondence with his wife Miriam exposes severe miscommunication between the poet and musician.\(^{49}\) It appears, Patchen was left out of the loop, and unclear

as to what Mingus would be playing/planning for the poetry up until days before the gig.

Here we comprehend a frustrated Patchen in a letter to his wife Miriam dated Sunday afternoon, March 8, 1959:

Dearest, I put it plain and clear to Mingus that unless he got down to what we supposed to be doing – and didn’t immediately stop all the nonsense stuff – that I was canceling the engagement at the Living Theater. And that, further, I wanted him to come down to W. 15th Street apt this evening to go over the program with me. He apologized for all the trouble he caused; promised to come down – said that he saw now that he’d be in the wrong, etc. At least he knows that I mean what I say: so something can be worked up, however far it falls short of what I’d like it to be.\textsuperscript{50}

By Tuesday March 11, the two had worked it out, and Patchen drops by The Half Note to arrange a rehearsal time for their upcoming engagement at Living Theater with Mingus’s jazz workshop series. An image of the program appears in the Appendix. On Saturday, May 23, 1959, Patchen performed with jazz at the community theater inside his hometown of Palo Alto. Part 1 of the program was divided into three parts: jazz without poetry, poetry with jazz, and closing with Patchen reading solo. Part 2 was divided in half: the first, jazz without poetry followed by a combined set. The musicians were an ensemble called Jazz V led by drummer Bob Rynolds, featuring Al Kay, bass; Jim Murphy, piano; Ralph Marbry, trumpet; and Harvey Leventhal on alto and baritone saxophone. This particular gig also featured four individual trumpet players (Bob Wilson, Dent Hand, Tom Kronzer and Willie Chaboya), billed as “Plus IV.” The group performed original compositions arranged by Jim Murphy and Greg McCurry; a program appears in the Appendix.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{50} Kenneth Patchen, a letter to Miriam Patchen, March 10 1959, from UCSC Special Collections and Archives, MS 160, 6:1.

\textsuperscript{51} There is no released recording of this performance, but there is a field recording inside the UCSC Kenneth Patchen Archives and a synopsis of the performance appears on \textit{Chapter 2: Analysis}. 
Patchen’s botched spinal surgery kept him a slave to his bed in the forthcoming decades until his death in 1972. He kept busy through the remainder of the 50s, producing many original “painted poems” and a jazz-play entitled “Don't Look Now” that was slated to debut at The Living Theater in NYC.

By the end of 1959, *Jazz Review* published a jazz/poetry recap/eulogy piece, entitled “Whatever became of JAZZ and POETRY.” The discussion prompted by Jonathan Williams appears in February with his article “Homer Wuz Sho Biz” (most likely relating to Kenneth Rexroth’s desire to return to the days of Homer). Williams, a fan of jazz/poetry, perceived it within a high-brow arena, calling it an extension of the classical oratorio tradition—from Baroque through Schoenberg’s *Sprechgesang* in *Pierrot Lunarie* to the “bop-type melisma and coloratura of Sarah Vaughan and Ella Fitzgerald.” He favored Patchen because of his oral expressivity and the music’s own purpose and supports his arguments by retracing classical music’s historical wedding of text and music.

Around 1590, a group of literati, calling themselves *Camerata* based its attack on renaissance music on the handing of the words…claiming that in contrapuntal music the poetry was literally “torn to pieces” because the individual voices sang different words simultaneously. Words like “heaven” and “wave” frequently depicted by high notes and wavy lines…they insisted that the sense of an entire passage rather than that of a single word should be imitated…the music was completely subordinated to the words…the words governed the musical rhythm and even the place of the cadences. The recitative was sung from its very beginning with the hitherto unknown realistic pathos, resorted to grimaces, acting and imitation of the inflections of natural speech, like crying and gasping…

What separates Williams from the other jazz/poetry critics of the time is that his outlook is from the musician’s perspective, not the poets. He greeted jazz/poetry with optimism

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and praised it for its inventiveness, while warning jazz/poets that “the rhythm should always be observed by the reciter” and proceeds to dissect the different devices musicians can employ using such musical descriptors as “intonation” and “timbre.” Williams received a rebuttal in August when Christopher Whent took a stance for poetry’s sake. Whent believed poetry was “a state to which language may attain,” musical accompaniment could never represent its essence. He ridiculed jazz/poetry as a “retrograde step” citing that “poetry in its fully developed form is destroyed by this attempted union.” According to Whent, the poem that is married or to be wed with music, is a lesser quality poem. The war wages on! Patchen’s legacy, by introducing “serious” music into the folk of jazz/poetry is still being felt today; an excerpt from an interview with John Hollenbeck, regarding his Patchen project released in 2011, appears in Chapter 3.

**Part 3: Jack Kerouac’s Jazz Affinity**

I am an artful storyteller, a WRITER in the great French narrative tradition, NOT a ‘spokesman’ for a million hoods. — Jack Kerouac

Jack Kerouac’s recitation without music has been repeatedly compared to that of a jazz musician playing. Gerald Nicosia writes in his essay “Kerouac as Musician: Notes and Interpretations of Readings by Jack Kerouac on the Beat Generation,” that in “the way Charlie Parker would use the score of some old jazz classic…Kerouac flawlessly articulating theses multiple tongue twisters—like Charlie Parker running through a dozen

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54 Ibid, 28.
56 Gilbert Milstein, liner notes to *Poetry for the Beat Generation*. Hanover 5000, 1959. LP.
quick chord changes.” And Stephen Ronan, author of *Jack Kerouac, Recording Artist*, writes that “[Patchen, Ferlinghetti, or Rexroth never] equaled Kerouac’s success,” saying that they stretched “their usual reading voices to accommodate the music being played behind them. Kerouac, on the other hand, was one of the musicians, a virtuoso of tone and mood.”

His relationship with musician/composer David Amram provides a clear link between how the poet related with jazz, and, like many poets who work with musicians, aspired to be a musician himself. The two met in October 1956. Amram’s second memoir, *Offbeat: Collaborating with Kerouac* describes how the two began working together in New York in 1957, first at the Brata Art Gallery. Amram recalls pairing up with drummer (and poet) Howard Hart with two poets (Philip Lamantia and Kerouac) to perform at “the first jazz-poetry session.” Hart would later summarize the connection between with jazz and poetry: “deep within [jazz]…lies the hidden stream of the poet’s language.” The session wasn’t publicly advertised aside from a mimeographed typewritten handbill distributed at local clubs. The performance wasn’t coordinated and Amram describes it minimally. The performers probably improvised—most likely playing a 12-bar blues—while the poets recited.

Then when it became a fashionable thing for a few months…everybody who had a gig would play “I’ve Got Rhythm” as fast as humanly possible and any who had the nerve to get up and scream into a microphone to see if they could drown out the band about how much they hated each other and America by swearing, cursing and freaking out…needless to say people who are paying for entertainment aren’t going to find that too entertaining…the so called “jazz-poetry” phase lasted three months.

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60 Amram, *Offbeat*, 15.
61 David Amram, interview by the author, July 5 2010, New York, digital recording from interview.
The gig at the Brata Art Gallery was a success, but Amram and Kerouac would not reunite until the Circle in the Square Theatre on December 27, 1957. They performed to a packed audience that eventually bled out onto the street in a “good-natured block party.”

Flyer for gig at the Circle in the Square, courtesy of David Amram.

Another great extended anecdote appears in *Offbeat*:

Suddenly, it seems overnight jazz-poetry was the new hot thing, and that was the last thing we ever had in mind. We weren’t trying to franchise our work, or ourselves or be trendsetters. We both had our life’s work. Jack had his books to write and I had my music to compose. When we worked together, aside from the fun we had, we shared an interest in finding new ways of combining the spoken word with music, without preconceived formulas. WE worked together with a mutual respect and understanding of the jazz tradition. Always listen. Always follow one another and always go with what the moment tells you to do. We didn’t stay exclusively in the idioms of the many worlds of jazz. My music and Jack’s reading and even his occasional singing of the words were done differently each time. The style of the music depended on the feeling of the moment. It always came

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out right. It was something we did together for the joy of doing it. Our message was for everyone present to celebrate that passing moment of time.\textsuperscript{63}

Jack Kerouac never recorded live with David Amram, but the two did collaborate on the short film \textit{Pull My Daisy} (1959) based off Kerouac’s poem of the same name. Directed by Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie, the film was adapted by Kerouac from the third act of his play, \textit{Beat Generation}. In the movie, Kerouac provides improvised narration intertwined with his previously composed prose. David Amram, who appears in the film, also composed the score and music to the tune “Pull My Daisy.”\textsuperscript{64}

Between the gig at The Brata Art Gallery and the Circle in the Square, Kerouac had an eventful stint at the Village Vanguard beginning on December 19, 1957. Max Gordon’s nightclub had already established itself as a major venue not only for major jazz performers and folk musicians, but also as forum for poets to meet and to be heard. Amram was unavailable for accompaniment, so Kerouac reluctantly took the stage solo. Mostly due to Kerouac’s intoxication level, his “disastrous” week at the Vanguard was short lived.\textsuperscript{65} A vignette by Dan Wakefield graphically captures the contrasting personalities of Jack Kerouac and trombonist J.J. Johnson at the Village Vanguard around this time. This story depicts how Kerouac was trying, perhaps too hard, to insert himself into a community and receive approval. Johnson responds with a humorous combination of “quiet dignity and dry humor.”

Kerouac started off his set by readings a piece about his pal the bartender at The Cellar in San Francisco, one of the beats hangouts. I looked toward Lou, the bartender at the Vanguard, to get his reaction. When Kerouac

\textsuperscript{63} Amram, \textit{Offbeat}, 19.
\textsuperscript{64} Amram composed music using previously recorded Kerouac taped readings of “Orizaba 2010 Blues” and “Washington D.C Blues,” for \textit{On the Road} (1999). The album also features a Kerouac reading a poem titled “On The Road” with music by performed by Tom Waits (composer) and Primus.
\textsuperscript{65} Amram, \textit{Offbeat}, 19.
finished, Lou shook his head and said, “He won’t make bartender friends if he keeps on usin’ that.” I drifted from my stool at the bar to try to hear other reactions. People who I guessed were leftovers from an uptown office party were shifting restlessly at their table and speaking under their breath while Kerouac read, until one man shushed into quiet and explained, “Some people like this stuff.” There was scattered. Perfunctory applause when Kerouac finished, and I followed him to the room backstage where the trombone player J.J. Johnson and his sidemen were sitting around a table talking quietly—soberly—at their break. Kerouac pulled up a chair to the edge of their group, but no one paid any attention to him until he asked Johnson, What did you think of what I read?” Johnson, a dignified Negro from my hometown of Indianapolis, stared at the reeling [presumably drunk] writer a moment and asked politely if he had written it himself. Kerouac admitted he had, and after a pause Johnson’s trombone playing and said if he had written it himself. Kerouac admitted he had, and after a pause Johnson said diplomatically, “It sounded very deep.” Kerouac complimented Johnson’s trombone playing and said he had always wanted to play saxophone himself: trombone playing and said he had always wanted to play saxophone himself: “Man, I could really work with a tenor sax.” Johnson eyed him coolly and said, “You look more like a trumpet man to me.” That was all Kerouac got from the pros.66

The first night of Kerouac’s stint at the Vanguard was a flop, it was a packed house and he didn’t deliver. The gig paid five hundred dollars a week, a price a bit low for Kerouac due to his novel On The Road not selling. In a letter to a friend, he complained about the pay, stating that he needed money to support his mother.67 He lamented that he needed to “teach people how to read in an age of TV, so they describe my sweating face, they sneer at the crowds that came to hear me because they run the gamut from Steve Allen to bums with runsacks.”68 Tonight Show host and pianist Steve Allen had come to support Kerouac, and while as J.J. Johnson was less sympathetic to Kerouac’s dreams, Allen believed that Kerouac was very much like a musician.

68 Ibid.
Aside from holding one of the most popular late-night slots in American television, Allen was an imaginative performer and patron of the arts.\textsuperscript{69} “I went to the Vanguard to see him [Kerouac] and immediately felt that his poetry should have unobtrusive musical accompaniment.”\textsuperscript{70} Allen thought of his piano playing as scoring the poetry, rather than simply playing jazz as an unrelated background color; he wanted to interact and react. Norman Granz, who later signed Kerouac to Verve, was in the house and obviously impressed by the performance. Despite Kerouac’s failed stint, the Vanguard gig served as the kernel of an idea that set in motion his entire recording career.\textsuperscript{71}

To record \textit{Poetry for the Beat Generation}, sometime in early 1958, Kerouac came up from Florida (where he was living at the time) to New York City to record with Steve Allen. He went into the studio to meet Allen at 1:00 pm carrying huge suitcase of untyped (handwritten) manuscript of prose and poetry. Kerouac hadn’t selected anything to read, and after Allen told him to read anything he wanted, Kerouac reached in, as if blind folded, and began to recite poems. Between takes, Kerouac drank his favorite wine, Thunderbird, and Steve Allen reluctantly joined in drinking. The two tracked for an hour: Kerouac reading while Allen improvised cocktail piano, riffing off standards, with a delicate palette underneath Kerouac’s charismatic reciting. The result was an experiment, if not, a novelty.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{69} Allen recorded Plato’s \textit{The Trial of Socrates} (Hanover, 1960) as a solo record with him reading and providing an original, incidental score on piano.

\textsuperscript{70} Steve Allen, liner notes to \textit{The Jack Kerouac Collection}, Rhino 70939, 1990, CD, 15.

\textsuperscript{71} In a letter to Lawrence Ferlinghetti, sometime before January 8, 1958, Kerouac said casually in passing that he “must do an album reading my works with Steve Allen on piano.” In the same letter he talks about a reading he gave, where he read one of Steve Allen’s own “sensitive lil poems,” Lee Konitz was in the audience and said that Kerouac “blew music. Ann Charters, ed. \textit{Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1957-1969}, (New York, NY: Viking, 1999), 99-100.

\textsuperscript{72} Gilbert Milstein, liner notes to \textit{Blues and Haikus, Blues and Haikus}. Hanover 5006, 1959. LP.
Poetry for the Beat Generation was initially released on Dot Records. Label founder Randy Wood stopped its pressing and distribution, declaring that certain passages were “in bad taste,” certain lines “off color,” and that, he would not permit his children to listen to it, and that “his diskery would never distribute a product that’s not clean family entertainment.” This decision was made under the radar from Bob Thiele, Wood’s VP and head of A&R. Thiele compared Kerouac’s work to that of Walt Whitman and e. e. cummings, or a painting in the Louvre, stating that “children don’t necessarily need to see or read these things.” Thiele went onto produce Kerouac’s second jazz/poetry release, but this time the producer used his own label, Hanover Records.  

Allen invited Kerouac on the The Steve Allen Show in 1959. In the brief interview, Allen calls Kerouac the spokesman for the “beat generation.” The phrase, coined Kerouac and writer John Clellon Holmes, didn’t appeal to many of those it was slapped onto, yet Kerouac was not able to shake this perception. He was and continues to be marketed on the term “beat.”

Kerouac’s next jazz/poetry album was Blues and Haikus. The album was “partly the result of a growing confidence in Kerouac,” that he was “not a professional performer,” yet could “read well for a general audience.” This session is one of many firsts: the first time Al Cohn plays piano on record, the first time Jack Kerouac sings on record, and the first recorded experimentation of trading between a poet and musician.  

Kerouac himself recalls how the session came together:

I’ve always thought it would be beautiful to have just a tenor saxophone with no rhythm section or piano, just the pure vibrating horn,” had written of this date. “So I asked for Zoot Sims, my favorite tenor man, and bgod

73 Hanover Records was short-lived, subsidiary label of Signature Records. Gilbert Milstein, liner notes to Poetry for the Beat Generation. Hanover 5000, 1959, LP.
74 Gilbert Milstein, liner notes to Blues and Haikus, Blues and Haikus. Hanover 5006, 1959. LP.
he came and not only that but with the great Al Cohn. The two of them play like brothers. My feeling about Zoot and Al is that they play and pray like pretty babies. A compliment. I don’t mean ‘immaturity’, I mean Holy Blakean babies, soft as sheep on the mountainside with their softreeds and sweetest ideas. Zoot and Al blow thoutful sweet metaphysical sorrows.  

“American Haikus,” a tune in which Kerouac trades off and on with Sims and Cohn out of time, is particularly special. Jazz/poet David Meltzer said that the haikus were “wonderful examples of dialogues absent in the other records.” Kerouac’s haiku does not abide by Japanese rules. “The American Haiku is not the exactly the Japanese Haiku. The Japanese Haiku is strictly disciplined to 17 syllables but since the language structure is different I don’t think American Haikus (short three-lined poems indeed to be completely packed with Void of Whole) should worry about syllables because American speech is something again…bursting to pop.” Zoot Sims and Al Cohn treated like “just another record.” Bob Thiele confirms that two horn players didn’t stick around for playback. The night ended with the Thiele and Kerouac drinking, Kerouac was so upset that he ended up throwing bottles on the pavement. The two hailed separate cabs; it was the last time the two saw each other. Kerouac left Dot Records joined up with Norman Grantz at Verve to track his final record of the decade. Readings by Jack Kerouac on The Beat (Verve, 1960) is an entirely a cappella record with liner notes by Allen Ginsberg. Kerouac read a handful of his jazz-influenced poems including “San Francisco Scene” and “The Sounds of the Universe in My Window.”

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75 Ibid.  
77 Gilbert Milstein, liner notes to Kerouac, Jack. Blues and Haikus. Hanover 5006, 1959. LP.
Part 4: Charles Mingus, Langston Hughes and the Migration from Uptown to Downtown

Jazz gives poetry a much wider following, and poetry brings jazz that greater respectability people seem to think it needs. I don’t think jazz needs it, but most people seem to. – Langston Hughes

Reading poetry with jazz was natural for Langston Hughes. He would go on to take it quite seriously, riding a natural progression from casual performance to professional presentation. Through the 1920s and 1930s, Hughes enjoyed Harlem’s rich artistic output including Duke Ellington and James P. Johnson, and by the end of the 40s Hughes had become friendly with Charles Mingus. In the late 50s, the jazz scene had migrated from Lenox Avenue (Harlem) to 52nd Street (Midtown) and had arrived in Greenwich Village (Lower Manhattan).

In 1954 Hughes released an “instructional” record called The Story of Jazz (Folkways, 1954) featuring his written/recited narration atop, and interspersed with, iconic jazz recordings. On the record, he advises the listener on how to listen, taking them on a musical tour through the decades: from Jelly Roll Morton, Johnny Dodds, Ma Rainey and Louis Armstrong, through Count Basie and Duke Ellington, Mary Lou Williams, concluding with Dizzy Gillespie’s own hip-talk jazz/poetry composition, “Oo Pa Pa Da.”

Hughes was a jazz advocate, not just a performer; it was personal to him. So imagine his reaction to the downtown Manhattan scene in 1957 when clubs were billing and marketing the a “new art” he naturally saw as one connected flowing,

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78 Duff, Morris. “Believes Poetry Good for Jazz.” Toronto Daily Star, 4 April 1959
79 In 1955, Hughes also released an a capella recording (The Dream Keeper and Other Poems of Langston Hughes, Smithsonian Folkways 1955) featuring three poems read on The Weary Blues: “The Dream Keeper,” “The Weary Blues,” and “Night and Morn.”
interdisciplinary, all-encompassing continuum. Note the clipping: in 1958, Thelonious Monk was billed with “Jazz-Poetry” at the Five Spot Café. To Hughes, “the Beatniks appear[ed] to be just the current crop of bohemians in the art world. In another age they were called the lost generation.”

Hughes successfully followed Kerouac’s failed Vanguard stint, moving into a Sunday afternoon slot in the final week of 1957 or early 1958. He did well, bringing in a “non-beat, more affluent audience.”

On March 17, 1958, 56 year-old Langston Hughes released The Weary Blues, a jazz/poetry LP featuring one side of music arranged by Leonard Feather and the other side by Charles Mingus. “The first reasonably valid joining of jazz and poetry,” The Weary Blues features thirty-three poems mostly written in twelve-bar blues form; stanzas typically falling neatly into twelve bars performed by the musicians; some grouped together in montages that transition in sync with an array of musical styles. Leonard Feather’s band executes tightly knitted arrangements featuring Henry “Red” Allen,

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trumpet; Vic Dickenson, trombone; Sam “The Man” Taylor, tenor sax; Al Williams, piano; Milt Hinton, bass; Osie Johnson, drums. The tunes quaintly set up the poetry for being read, there is little interaction. Mingus’s arrangements, on the flip side, are deeply sophisticated; numerous moments of harmonic ambiguity, contrapuntal part writing, and personalized musicianship (specifically on “The Stranger”). Although The Weary Blues was recorded entirely live (no overdubbing) Langston Hughes’ concept for and his musical collaboration with Leonard Feather and Charles Mingus is similar to Kenneth Patchen and Allyn Ferguson in that they all used the music as a palette of sound to set a mood for the words. The music served the poetry.

Charles Mingus not only worked with poets and actors, he himself was a poet. In 1957, he formed a relationship with actor Melvin Stuart; the two shared on selected “verbalized jazz” nights at the Village Vanguard. The following year, during the last weekend of July and the first of August, the two collaborated at the (second annual) Great South Bay Jazz Festival in Great River, Long Island.

On the final night of the Festival, Charlie Mingus, heading a group made up on Shafi Hadi on alto and tenor saxophones, Horace Parlan on piano, Jimmie Knepper on drums, worked his way through three superior numbers, which included a blues ingeniously hooked up to an extremely attractive melody, several rhythms, breaks, and some first rate solos. (A fourth number was centered on an actor, Melvin Stewart, who accompanied by Mingus on piano, read some bad poems.

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82 Two notable pieces featuring the composer’s own spoken poetry/lyric: “Fables Of Faubus” (Mingus Ah Um, 1959) and “The Chill of Death” (Let My Children Hear Music, 1972).
83 The two went onto collaborate on “Scenes in the City,” a narrative co-written by Langston Hughes that appears on A Modern Jazz Symposium of Music and Poetry (Bethlehem, 1957). Full article from the New Yorker appears in Appendix. Whitney Balliett, “Musical Events,” The New Yorker, August 16 1958, 72.
Both Mingus and Hughes continued careers fusing the mediums, and later in 1959, as already discussed, Mingus went onto work with Kenneth Patchen, and host his experimental residency Jazz Workshop series, which hosted many-a-poet with jazz.84

In his “only West Coast performance” on April 19 and 20, 1958, Langston Hughes appeared in Los Angeles at the Ivan Theater with band led by Ralph Pena. This concert featured a three-part program: Blues and Dixieland Poems, Cool Sounds and Bop Poems, and Gospel and Religious Poems. On July 23, he appeared at the Stratford Festival in Ontario accompanied by Henry “Red” Allen’s All Stars during the regular jazz series time, as well as a “special, afternoon program of poetry reading called Poetry Born of Music.” The poet explained that his program would stress the poems “folk sources in the blues, spiritual and jazz idioms,”85 and is likely to have been divided similarly to the Ivan Theater show in earlier that year.

Also in 1958, Hughes’s work was being interpreted into original jazz/poetry compositions. Bob Dorough and his Quintet interpreted Hughes’s “Dream Keeper,” “Night and Morn,” and “Daybreak in Alabama” on Jazz Canto Vol. 1, An Anthology of Poetry and Jazz (World Pacific, 1958).86 The record was strictly a studio project—the eight separate collaborations were never performed live—commissioned by Lawrence Lipton, author of the North Beach bohemia case study, The Holy Barbarians (1959). He writes about aurality in a clever, quirky manner:

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84 In Chapter 3, Barry Wallenstein recalls his first jazz/poetry session at a Workshop in the early 1970s.
85 “Jazz Poet To Appear At Festival.” Globe and Mail, June 15, 1958.
86 “Dog” by Lawrence Ferlinghetti is interpreted by Dorough. Dorough, composer of many songs including the School House Rock series, worked with Kenneth Patchen (not on record) and with poet David Melzer (Poet w/ Jazz, 1958). Jazz Canto widened the jazz/poetry horizon by presenting a number of different styles of poetry with a variety of Los Angeles based composers/groups—Bob Hardaway, Bob Dorough, Roy Glenn, Gerry Mulligan, Chico Hamilton and Ralph Pena—on one record. The expansion of this study of jazz/poetry will include further analysis (historical and theoretical) of the collaborations captured on the Jazz Canto session.
The variety of rhythmical patterns that can trigger kinesthetic response in the listener is very great, the most obvious being those which produce a sound effect in nature itself, such as a dog's trot, a running horse, the ticking of a clock, the heartbeat, a person walking, ocean waves, thunder. Less obvious but none the less rhythmical are the seasons, the morning, noon and night tempos of everyday living, childhood, youth, maturity and aging, and the successive steps of the sexual experience.  

In 1959, Langston Hughes was continuing to make the papers in Canada. The *Toronto Daily Star* (April 4, 1959) reported that Hughes made his TV jazz/poetry debut in Vancouver on the CBC, and *The Telegram* (April 9, 1959) reported on a gig the previous evening at the Museum Theater with the Jack Lander Trio. The band featured Jerry Toth, saxophone; Jack Lander, bass; and Ed Birkett, guitar. Their drum-less texture provided a “sympathetic backing.” Also, Nathan Cohen of the *Toronto Daily Star* reported that first half of Hughes’ program was a “washout” and he poet recovered his audience in the second half:

> The music up to now an obtrusive and distracting background, interpreted an amplified the images and feelings Mr. Hughes was verbally drawing. In turn the words, at times, astringent, at another times quietly passionate, and sometimes warm and wounding, gave meaning and shape to the music.

Towards the end of the decade, Langston Hughes was spotted playing with pianist Randy Weston and his quintet at the Village Gate in the West Village on an early evening Sunday set on May 3, 1959. A flyer appears in the Appendix.

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Part 5: Concluding Thoughts

To put a cap at the end of the decade and say: “this is when jazz/poetry faded away” would be a fallacy. The art form created a continuum that extends its practice—written, oral, and aural—into the 60s, 70s, and so on. Coupled with the rising civil rights movement, much of the jazz/poetry into the 60s contains racially conscious poetry atop a range of free jazz from vivacious to melancholy. The jazz/poetry trajectory takes the listener into territories dealing with the social commentary of Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, Nicki Giovani, The Last Poets, and eventually Gil Scott-Heron, Tom Waits, and so many more. Poetry and jazz are often billed together at live venues, but performed separately; a common hurdle within specialized jazz/poetry research. For example, a press clipping of an Eric Dolphy performance vaguely describes a double bill with poet Ree Dragonette at Town Hall in 1963, but examination of audio from the performance reveals that the music and recitation were not synergistically combined.90 Jazz/poetry also finds itself in strange places, such as Herbie Hancock’s all-star lineup of musicians playing with rabbinical narration on the album Hear, O Israel: A Prayer Ceremony In Jazz (1968). The jazz/poetry “fad” may have begun in 1956, but there is much ground to be covered in examining its effect on both jazz and poetry communities, particularly through the lens of jazz musicianship and stream-of-consciousness improvisation. Their ongoing collaboration is an extension of the jazz/poetry lineage, and continues to blur the lines between song, poem, jazz, art song, electronica and hip-hop. For more on future jazz/poetry collaborations see Chapter 3.

Chapter 2: Recordings and Analysis

Introduction: Searching for Aurality, the Motivation for Analysis

Charles O. Hartman’s Jazz Text (1991) is a terrific study that explores musical troupes, contour, and gestures alongside literary devices dealing with the voice. Hartman expands the bridge between jazz and poem, equating Jerome Kern’s falling 5th harmonic sequence in “All The Things You Are” to that of a rhetorical trope; in this case, a pun. “Different tropes in music verge on each other as indefinitely as those in literature,” he writes, “but away from the boundaries they are quite recognizable.” Hartman recognizes one conjoining trait possessed by the aspiring poet, and jazz musician: the search for “their own voice.” And although Meta DuEwa Jones’s Muse is the Music (2011) breaks new ground concerning the musicality of Langston Hughes’s written and spoken word, this study expands the discussion into the music theory arena. Through the aid of transcription and analysis, I will exclusively examine the jazz/poetry recordings (and live performances) that define the genre itself. Throughout the course of this chapter, consider the following chart when examining the transcribed music and recordings addressed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Interaction</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>CR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syllabic/Rhythmic</td>
<td>SRR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bed of Sound</td>
<td>SB</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trading</td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interaction lies in the hands of the musicians. They are the instigators. A content response signifies a reaction in the music dealing with the content or the concrete

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imagery of the poetry. In classical music, this is often referred to as text painting. Such an example would be a musician playing a descending motive in response to, or in conjunction with spoken words about a waterfall. A syllabic/rhythmic response correlates and/or translates the syllable count of a word/line of poetry. Performed rhythms (eighth notes, triplets, etc.) and can be executed freely or against a defined pulse. Interaction using trading implies that there is a pause between the poet and the musician. This pause allows the performers to digest each sound before contributing their own portion of the sonic space. Interactions may be combined; within a moment of trading, the musician can respond based on the rhythmic delivery of the poet. Certain words are underlined to emphasize my point, and I also include timed markings that coordinate with the recordings themselves.

**Part 1: Jack Kerouac’s Bop Prosody**

On *Poetry for the Beat Generation*, pianist Steve Allen and Jack Kerouac have a unique, often separate-but-equal interaction concept. Allen’s piano playing on “October in the Railroad Earth” is a delicate, subtle improvisation on common ballad chord changes; he incorporates ii-V motion similar to the A section of Errol Gardner’s “Misty.” Kerouac rarely leaves space for the music to breathe, but when he does, Allen fills in with bluesy runs. Certain lines bring out CR from Steve Allen: Kerouac says “puffs floating by from Oakland,” Allen responds with a descending bluesy run, and one distinct moment of interaction (4:04) appears when Kerouac recalls how “a bum fell into the whole of the construction job.” Allen, without missing a beat, cascades a long downward
pentatonic run from the upper register of the piano. Kerouac even sings (somewhat in key) “mama he treats your daughter mean” (5:08).

Throughout the entire recording, Kerouac is chuckling between lines, using different voices and personalities, a parallel to how a horn player may utilize a variety of inflections, nuanced bends and scoops. Kerouac playfully uses the word “doll” to emphasize his strong Northeastern accent, and onomatopoeia becomes a omnipresent with “I should have played with her shurrouriuruurururuurururururururururururururururururururdie” (6:59). After this last word, he chuckles, and Allen resolves to major seven of the tonic.

Allen begins “Deadbelly” with a slow boogie-woogie left hand motion. The content of the poem: “Old Man Moes-Early American Jazz Pianist.” Allen keeps the blues steady atop Kerouac’s word play: “lead killed lead belly, dead belly admit, dead belly modern cat, cool, dead belly, man, craziest!” The last word rings true; many a jazz fanatic might call Bud Powell or Art Tatum “the craziest.” This blues also ends with Kerouac chuckling his last line “would dead belly get ahead” into a slow cadence to the tonic F7 but instead landing on a F Major 13.

“Charlie Parker” is a seamless reading of the 239th, 240th and 241st Chorus of Kerouac’s “Mexico City Blues.” The recording begins with Allen playing an introduction similar to Duke Ellington’s iconic piano flourishes from “In A Sentimental Mood.” This piece is his homage, his ode, perhaps even his eulogy to Charlie Parker. Kerouac was a huge fan of Bird, and wrote about him often by calling him Buddha (Bird was overweight towards the end of his life), and bald, “calm and profound,” “lidded eyes, and expression that says all is well.” It’s ironic that Kerouac, like many, heard joy in Bird’s playing, but the two were both quite destructive in their own personal lives and health.
Charlie burst his lungs to reach the speed
Of what the speedsters wanted
And what they wanted
Was his eternal Slowdown.92

This is the zinger! Kerouac’s timing literally speeds up reaching an elongated
“slowdown.” His cadential timing is so precise; it appears to have been rehearsed. This
aligns perfectly with Kerouac’s “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose” procedure: “Time
being of the essence in the purity of speech, sketching language is undisturbed flow from
the mind of personal secret idea-words, blowing (as per jazz musician) on subject of
image.”93

Despite Kerouac’s frequent spurts of mono-syllabics (“blop,” “plop,” “toot,”
“wail,” “wop”), there isn’t much interaction with Allen’s playing, mostly SB. There is a
break in the sound bed (2:50) when the two seem to take a breath at the same moment
before entering with the seven-syllable phrase. This phrase employs SRR interaction with
stresses on the second syllable. Just as the swing rhythm of jazz emphasizes beats 2 and 4
or the “and” of an eight note run, Kerouac emphasizes the second syllable of his words.
He implies swing! It’s surprising that Allen chose not to quote or infuse his improvisation
with any Charlie Parker clichés, licks or motives. Allen sticks to his guns, remaining
strictly in the background only to serve the poetry. Here is an example when the two
improvise in sync:

Allen’s passive musical role is perhaps what propelled Kerouac to move in the opposite direction with his follow-up recording.

Within “The Wheel of the Quivering Meat Conception,” we hear plethora of interaction between Allen and Kerouac. It’s remarkable to hear how Allen improvises using text painting between each animal. The time it takes for Kerouac to spit his lick, is the time Allen has to absorb.

Pigs, turtles, frogs, insects, nits,
Mice, lice, lizards, rats, roan
Racing horses, poxy bucolic pigtics,
Horrible unnamable lice of vultures,
Murderous attacking dog-armies
Of Africa, Rhinos roaming in the jungle,
Vast boars and huge gigantic bull
Elephants, rams, eagles, condors,
Pones and Porcupines and Pills

The diagram shows this passage transcribed with Steve Allen’s accompaniment. Harmony has been removed in light of strictly observing how the pianist responds rhythmically. A time signature, and rests have also been removed to give the feeling of freedom and spontaneity. They are playing in free time, exchanging ideas with impeccable timing and creativity. Kerouac likes three syllable words (“horrible,” “murderous,” “Africa,” “elephants,”) and these give a natural triplet feeling when each is syllable is enunciated clearly and articulately.

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The Wheel of the Quivering Meat Coception

An analysis based on rhythmic responses.
Piano notation implies relative pitch, phrase shape and interval relationships.

0:36

frogs in cects nits mice lice lizards

block chord hits

nats roan rac-ing horses poxy bacel-ie

sustain sustain

pig-tics Hor-ble un-name-a-bie lice of vul-tures mur-der-ous

dramatic

a-tuck-ing dog ar-mies of Af-rica rhin-os roam-ing in the jungle

a tempo

vast bears and huge gig-an-tic bull el-e-phant rams cu-gles

sustain FP sustain sustain

con-dores pones and por-cu-pines and pills.
This type of exchange is amplified on Kerouac’s follow-up recording with jazz, *Blues and Haikus*. “American Haikus” is another example of jazz/poetry packed with a variety of responses within a trading environment. Remember that Kerouac’s Haiku does not abide by Japanese rules, and is more a splatter of a poem, a lick. These examples of Zoot Sims and Al Cohn, transcribed below, display their imaginative ears.

**Selected "American Haikus"**

Tenor Saxophone

Voice

```
prayer beads   on the hol-y book   my knees are cold
```

Ten. Sax.

```
in the morn-ing frost   the cuts step   slow-ly
```
Ten. Sax.

15

21
drunk as a hoot owl writing letters my thunder storm

23

29
beauti-ful young girls run-ning up the lib-ra-ry steps with shorts on

31

Sims

Sims
Part 2: Langston Hughes & Trading the Blues

I don’t dare start thinking in the morning
I don’t dare start thinking in the morning
If I thought thoughts in bed, them thoughts would bust my head
So I don’t dare start thinking in the morning

“Blues at Dawn,” written by Langston Hughes

Examining just how Langston Hughes recites poetry, either with music or without, deserves some attention. The performance practice of telling and absorbing a story, preserving the form orality to aurality, stems back to West African griots. This examination of Hughes’s speech with and interaction with Henry “Red” Allen serves as a testimony to how the poet delivers his words and how trading or traditional call-and-response is part of the genetic makeup of the blues artist. On “Blues at Dawn,” Hughes

95 Langston Hughes, Montage of a Dream Deferred (New York: Holt, 1951), 61.
and trumpeter Henry “Red” Allen exchange in trading. The example displays a transcription with a highlighted moment of uncertainly appearing in bar 14. Hughes seems to cut Allen off, but Allen quickly recovers holding out F4 during the dialogue so as to not clutter the sonic space. Hughes’s own pace and cadential rise and fall is represented with rhythmic notation.

Langston Hughes and Henry "Red" Allen

I don’t dare start think—is in the morning

If I thought thoughts in bed them thoughts would bust my head
Part 3: *Ferlinghetti in The Cellar*
The most critically discussed piece from of *Poetry Readings in “The Cellar”* was Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s “Autobiography” (what he called the first poem in the English language written specifically to be read with a jazz accompaniment; but what about Vachel Lindsay’s “The Congo”? 96 “Autobiography” doesn’t contain any isolated text painting or dramatization within the music, the band plays a role of the timekeeper; Ferlinghetti trades fours with the quintet, who keeps the form of “rhythm changes” in Bb major. When Ferlinghetti stops reading, they enter, sometimes sloppily where they left off in the form. Ferlinghetti doesn’t adhere to any particular musical meter, rhythm or form, but rather bases his pauses on poetic phrases. He takes liberties when reading the poem by restating, omitting lines, or changing them slightly from the published version. 97 Around 5:25 the recording sounds like the tape has been changed or spliced, the quality has audibly changed and the poem cuts in, skipping stanzas.

A chart of published versus recited portions of the poem appears on the following page. There is audible laughter from the audience after certain humorous deliveries as: “I got caught stealing pencils from the Five and Ten Cent Store the same month I made Eagle Scout” and the more satirical: “I am only temporarily a tie salesman. I am a good Joe. I am an open book to my boss. I am a complete mystery to my closest friends.” Could this “good Joe” be one of “squares” Rexroth predicted would gobble up jazz/poetry like a “swallowing goldfish”? 98

96 Ralph J. Gleason, liner notes to Kenneth Rexroth, *Poetry Readings in “The Cellar,”* Fantasy 7002, 1956, LP.
98 Gleason, “Perspectives,” May, 1957, 32.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Published</th>
<th>Recited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am an American.</td>
<td>I was an American.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was an American boy.</td>
<td>I am an American.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have seen the educated armies on the beach at Dover.</td>
<td>I have seen the ignorant armies on the beach at Dover.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have seen the garbage men parade in the Columbus Day Parade behind</td>
<td>I am leading a quiet life on lower East Broadway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the glib farting trumpeters.</td>
<td>I have seen the garbage men parade in the Columbus Day Parade behind the glib farting trumpeters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have not been out to the Cloisters in a long time</td>
<td>I have not been out to the Cloisters in a long time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...outside the Fun House in a great rainstorm still laughing.</td>
<td>...outside the Fun House in a great rainstorm still laughing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have heard the sound of revelry by night.</td>
<td>I am leading a quiet life outside of Mike’s Place every day...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have wandered lonely as a crowd.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am leading a quiet life outside of Mike’s Place every day...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...pointing Westward up the Ramblas toward the American Express</td>
<td>...pointing Westward up the Ramblas toward the American Express</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincoln in his stony chair</td>
<td>I have heard a hundred housebroken Ezra Pounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And a great Stone Face in North Dakota.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know that Columbus did not invent America.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have heard a hundred housebroken Ezra Pounds.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have read the writing on the outhouse wall.</td>
<td>I have read the writing on the men's room wall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I helped Kilroy write it.</td>
<td>I helped Kilroy write it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I marched up Fifth Avenue blowing on a bugle in a tight platoon</td>
<td>I marched up Fifth Avenue but hurried back to the Casbah looking for my dog.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>but hurried back to the Casbah looking for my dog.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have ridden superhighways and believed the billboard’s promises</td>
<td>I have ridden superhighways and believed the billboard’s promises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crossed the Jersey Flats and seen the Cities of the Plain</td>
<td>Slept in mailbox overnight cabins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crossed the Jersey Flats and seen the Cities of the Plain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have wandered in various nightwoods.</td>
<td>I have wandered in various nightwoods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have leaned in drunken doorways.</td>
<td>I have head the loud lament of the disconsolate chimera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have written wild stories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I am the man.
I was there.

I suffered somewhat.
I have sat in an uneasy chair.
I am a tear of the sun.

I am a raid on the inarticulate.
I have dreamt that all my teeth fell out but my tongue lived to tell the tale.
For I am a still of poetry.

I have written wild stories without punctuation.
I have leaned in drunken doorways.
I have heard the tolling bell.
I am a tear of the sun.

I have sat in an uneasy chair.
I am a raid on the inarticulate.
I have made periphrastic studies
In worn out poetical fashions
And my equipment
Is always deteriorating.

Note: Ferlinghetti continues with the published stanza: "I have dreamt…" after this new material.

She did not speak English.
She had yellow hair and a hoarse voice.

She did not speak English.
She had yellow hair and a hoarse voice and no birds sang.

On “Junkman’s Obbligato,” trumpeter Dickie Mills improvises an intro to the (entirely improvised) piece. Observe the transcriptions and its astonishingly frequent moments of synchronicity between poet and performer.
Junkman's Obbligato
Trumpet and Voice

Trumpet

Voice

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

Let's go lets go come on lets go empty out our pockets

and disappear into the bower Missing all our apostrophe mens and turning up

un-shaven years later all cigarette papers stuck to our pants leaves in our
Part 4: (Re)constructing Kenneth Patchen’s Jazz/Poetry Legacy

The material in this section includes materials from the Kenneth Patchen Archive at the McHenry Library on campus at the University of California Santa Cruz. As described in the Chapter 1, Patchen performed with groups led by both Allyn Ferguson and Alan Neil. Both of these collaborations were captured on record, but one collaboration, one that was not covered by any news outlet, and that was omitted from the Patchen’s own biography, was a performance with a group called Jazz V led by drummer Tom Reynolds. The live performance, captured on reel from the gig is a rare 333-minute bootleg of Patchen readings with jazz. The first piece, an unnamed poem, features

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Patchen also performed (but did not record) with Johnny Wittwer and The New Bed of Roses Chamber Jazz Group.
various soloists playing underneath the reading. The band, savvy bebop players, vamps a swing 12-bar (Bird) blues. Certain lines in the poetry, read with elongated syllables ("hellfire hymns, sort of singing from the bottom") cue tags played by the band. Pianist Jim Murphy is the main soloist, with light delicate attacks here and there; overall there is very little interaction or reaction from the band. However, they are listening. As Patchen’s voice gets softer, the band too, decrescendos. Another important factor is that Patchen is reading each of his phrases (assumingly these are stanzas) within one blues chorus. The piece ends with a rehearsed and written out rubato tag. At this point, we hear the audience’s joy for the art with audible “hoots” and hollers.

The next tune is an arrangement paired with a reading of Patchen’s “The Little Green Blackbird.” Playing off the poem’s title, the arrangement begins with Havey Leventhal (alto saxophone) and Ralph Marbry (trumpet) playing an unaccompanied introduction, quoting Ray Henderson’s “Bye Bye Blackbird.” The poem is bit of a story, prose poem with punch lines often falling at the conclusion of the piece’s six parts/stanzas. Throughout the entire reading, there is a great deal of audible laughter from the audience. After the introduction, Patchen reads the title of the poem, and the band enters with an up-tempo blues complimented by Reynolds’s impressive brushwork. Throughout the reading, there are soloists improvising, a tactic avoided by Allyn Ferguson’s compositions; Ferguson typically had soloists improvise while Patchen was resting. Pianist Jim Murphy jabs the piano with crush chords and tri-tone intervals in response to the following passage:
So the little green blackbird drove off
Down the road until he reached a bridge;
Then, adjusting his cap, and his thumbs,
He said, "What are you doing in that river?"  

Patchen transitions from stanza III to IV with a grand pause. When he reenters for section IV, part of the poem unfolds as a list of animals. Patchen takes this sort of “riff” and builds in intensity, which the instrumentals pick up on it, filling in the space between his words with short melodic spurts. There isn’t much time for the musicians to text paint each animal but the list gives them a chance to responds sonically.

And a buffalo and a beaver and a donkey
And a tiger and a gorilla and a panther
And a salamander and a periwinkle and an ox
And an elephant and an alligator and an armadillo
And a mouse and a mule and a beetle
And a moonfish and a buffalo and a snail
And a horse and a lion and a butterfly
And a horse and a tiger and a mouse;  

The final, quite humorous lines of the poem (“…when it came time to go home, all nineteen thousand rabbits filed out in a pregnant silence…”) bring the audience to an uproar that concludes with the band playing a two bar blues tag at fortissimo, and the marathon poem is complete! Then Patchen introduces the core band individually—the extra trumpet players known as Plus IV are not on stage—and introduces the next set of poems as “four lullaby’s.” The first is “Catfish Lullaby.” The music is an original ballad, perhaps a contrafact, in a similar vein as Johnny Green’s “Body and Soul” and features on a muted trumpet. The second lullaby, unannounced and short in length, features the accompaniment of the George Shearing’s “Lullaby of Birdland” played at

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101 Ibid, 48.
medium swing with Marbry soloing underneath it all with occasional piano fills by Murphy. The poem ends, and the ensemble is forced to end the tune mid-form. This makes for a sloppy ending that is clouded by piano flourishes, a drum ritardando, and the bass performs a blues tag. The band fades out but Murphy continues playing unaccompanied on piano a classically influenced minor tune reminiscent of Gene de Paul’s “You Don’t Know What Love Is?”

This music continues into Patchen’s third lullaby entitled “Who’ll That Be.” After the poem’s reading concludes, Reynolds executes drum fills atop the piano, then switches to brushes to make for a seamless transition into syncopated Latin-jazz hits; a groove akin to Dizzy Gillespie’s “Manteca.” The music fades out and Patchen speaks to the audience: “Finally, I’m sure you guessed the title to this last one, “Little Cannibals Bedtime Song.” The poem has subtle accompaniment and concludes with a large fortissimo, lick (written out or rehearsed) to close out the tune. Patchen addresses the audience once more, thanking them, and announcing the final piece of the first half, “As I Opened the Window.”

The piece begins with a drum fill, freely played up-beat horn hits enter followed by a walking bass line, at which point Patchen reads the title. The tune is played a medium/slow tempo; its form is a 12-bar blues, followed by an 8-bar bridge and another 12-bar blues. We can compare this reading with Patchen’s reading on Kenneth Patchen Reads with Jazz in Canada. It’s a similar recitation: elongated speech to emulate the speaker’s heavy intoxication. The musicians play through the form: first Murphy solos for a few choruses, followed by Leventhal, then Marbry. The band is perhaps thrown off

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from the reading. The transition from the saxophone to trumpet occurs and the bridge, and Marbry seems to miss the chord changes (he plays major over a minor chord) causing Murphy to pound the piano keys. There is a bit of an arrangement worked out with the band halting mid-poem, and a rubato (sloppy) ending that appears to be cued by the piano.

Recovering the Scores

Tucked off Exit 30 off Route 101 in Calabasas, California (30 miles west of L.A.), sits a storage unit in a long line of office buildings. On 23935 Ventura Blvd West resides composer Allyn Fergusson’s former workspace and nearly every composition he ever wrote. Ferguson, who paid his dues and earned his living scoring films and TV in Hollywood, passed away in 2010, leaving a publishing company and handwritten scores in the hands of his children Jillian, Todd and Dan Ferguson.

The entrance to Allyn Ferguson’s Music Suite in Calabasas, CA.
Images of the entrance to Allyn Ferguson’s Music Suite in Calabasas, CA.

Right side the storage facility sit boxes upon boxes of handwritten manuscripts.
Jill and Dan Ferguson pulled the full sized, handwritten scores out from a box, similar to the box labeled 15 pictured above, left side view of music suite.

It’s amazing that Jillian and Dan Ferguson were able to locate their father’s work with Kenneth Patchen, but they did. The materials within the folder labeled “Patchen Group” were scores and parts for the recording *Kenneth Patchen Reads with Allyn Ferguson and the Chamber Jazz Sextet*. To reiterate, the making of the record involved a three-step process: 1.) Patchen’s voice was recorded a capella, 2.) Allyn Ferguson absorbed the tape, composed and recorded his sextet without voice, 3.) Patchen’s voice was overdubbed atop the sextet’s recording.

Before I stepped foot into the storage unit, I wondered what the scores looked like and how Ferguson organized the poetry on the page. One year before *Kenneth Patchen Reads with Allyn Ferguson and the Chamber Jazz Sextet* was released, Patchen released a book of *Selected Poems* (New Directions, 1957), many of which he pulled from to record the album. When examining the scores and individual parts for this session, I hoped to
learn about the compositional and improvisational techniques Allyn Ferguson (and improvisers) adopted while performing with Patchen.

“Limericks” is comprised six separate limericks. Similar to Kerouac’s take on haikus, Patchen’s limericks stray from the “strict” rhyme scheme, With each refrain (“there was a…”) the music returns to the main theme (bar 4) which lands on a sustained D minor chord at rehearsal mark A. This sustained musical moment gives the poem its own sonic space. Ferguson carefully writes the poem on the staff without rhythmic notation, but remarkably lined up with the music’s entrances. Here is an example of two of the limericks Patchen chose to read:

“The Cowboy Who Went to College”

There was a cowboy went to college,
Where somebody spilled ink on his horse.
He went to the dean in charge of such things
And was told that that gentleman
Had just popped out to the can again.
“Oh, he has, has he!” cried the cowboy;
“And me thinking it might be an accident—
“Why, hell, it’s part of the damn curriculum!”

“The Forgetful Little Commuter”

There was a forgetful little commuter
Who one morning boarded a large sheepish dog
And rode to a splashing stop beside a fireplug;
Arrived home, he hung up his snapbrim wife,
And briefly kissing his hat, said, “Those damn forecasters!
I suppose that cloudburst is their idea of fair weather!”

106 Ibid., 135.
Photographed score courtesy of Allyn Ferguson Music Group
Photographed score courtesy of Allyn Ferguson Music Group
On “State of the Nation,” Ferguson clearly takes concrete imagery and composes using them, an example of CR. Following the phrase, “great things doing in Spain,” the music abruptly moves to a mambo beat with maracas and claves, (rehearsal mark B) and a baritone saxophone solo for 16 bars. A drum fill takes us back to the top where the poem continues. The music breaks at the same instance, only after the phrase, “great things doing in Russia,” does the music abruptly shifts to a straight groove (at the coda) with accents on upbeats akin to a Russian dance for 10 bar followed by, a 16 bar alto saxophone solo in a swing feel over a i-v motion in G minor. This takes us back to the top a final time. This last verse of the poem is read no differently than the rest, but the music fades (a post-tracking decision, not an organic fade) so that the final word is heard, recited a cappella at nearly a whisper. The full score for “State of the Nation” appears in the Appendix.

Other instances of text painting or CR occur in “The Lute in the Attic” which is written in a pseudo baroque style, and “The Murder of Two Men By A Young Kid Wearing Lemon Colored Gloves,” which is an up tempo, wild chase of an arrangement that plays off the reiteration and sonic placement of “wait,” uttered fourteen times before the climax of “NOW.” This baritone saxophone chart is particularly interesting for the poem (or rather cue words) have been scribed into the part in pen by, what appears to be the Modesto Briseno’s own handwriting. There is much work to be done concerning the jazz/poetry collaborative between Allyn Ferguson and Kenneth Patchen. The study would look back at Patchen’s work with composer John Cage in 1941, and Ferguson’s prolific work in Hollywood, which included scoring the 1962 American Cold War suspense thriller *The Manchurian Candidate* and co-writing the music for the late-1970s TV series
Charlie’s Angels. Allyn Ferguson related music to mood using texture, timing, and timbre, and through jazz/poetry—creating a hybrid art form—he was able to execute and grow his style in an arena that undoubtedly prepared him for a successful career in TV, film, and classical music.
Chapter 3: Adventures with/in Interviews

Introduction

I first began interviewing jazz musicians and poets about their collaborations in May 2010. Thanks to a Mentored Research and Creative Endeavors Award from Florida State University, I was able to conduct ethnographic research in order to gather the voices of poets and musicians in New York City. What I thought of as a “crash course” in documentation (film, audio, video) and interviewing techniques, turned out to be one of the most validating and exhilarating summers of my life. It became clear to me then, the purpose of interviewing and gathering “tape” (as we call it in the radio world) is to preserve, capture, and inevitably present.

I’ll never forget sitting outside at a table with David Amram at 2:00am on Cornelia Street, listening to him tell stories as the street sweeper loudly croaked passed. That night, I met a poet named Julian Joans, the grandson of Ted Joans (poet, painter, musician). We became pals that summer, hanging out at his apartment in Harlem, and he eventually introduced me to poet/producer Mike Ladd. Part 1 of this chapter focuses on juxtaposing an interview with Mike Ladd beside, his long-time friend and collaborator, pianist/composer Vijay Iyer. For both interviews, the subject’s speech is in standard typeface, my interjections are included when relevant, and appear with AA: before my statement and are displayed in bold. Part 2 features relevant segments from various interviews I have captured over the years.
Part 1: *Ladd and Iyer*

Section A: Meeting with Ladd

On Monday, Tuesday July 19, 2010 Julian Joans casually informed me that Mike Ladd and Vijay Iyer were in town working on a new project, and invited me to their rehearsal. Joans and Ladd were friends from when Ladd lived in NYC, and Joans jumped on any chance to see his friend and favorite emcee/musician/poet. The rehearsal we attended was at Harlem Stage on West 135th street. There, Julian Joans and I sat in a circle in the dimly lit theater with poets Mike Ladd and Maurice Decal, and director Patricia McGregor. The light from the laptop illuminated their faces as the poets shared their constructed works with us all. This interview with Mike Ladd was conducted the day after this read through; he wasn’t in NYC for long and would be heading home (Paris) in the next few days. We met where he was staying, a friend’s apartment, in the East Village. The apartment was an oasis: turn turntables, two bookcases full of vinyl, and images, garments and artifacts from around the world. A mesh hammock fastened to wooden spanned it’s interior.
The interview with Mike Ladd was a treat. I sat across from him at a small table. He smoked a cigarette. We both drank coffee. I opened up the conversation with discussing his teacher at Boston University, Robert Pinksy. Pinksy was at one time an aspiring jazz saxophonist and has gone on to become a powerful voice in modern poetry. He often reads with music, when he can, and many videos are available online. And after hearing Ladd’s raspy impersonation of Pinsky’s definitive inflection, I could tell it was a positive relationship.

Mike Ladd, Tuesday July 20, 2010 in the East Village at 10:30am

[interview begins]

For me, that [MFA] program was more for refinement. My real school of poetry was New York City. I was getting out of college, my 2nd to last year of school, I was suspended…long story. I started worked on the first Trans-Atlantic conference in Paris, sponsored by the Dubois Institute. Then I met three guys, Willie Perdomo, Kevin Powell and most importantly, Tony Medina. Tony Medina is probably the most generous poet/artist that I have ever met in terms of sharing his work and supporting young people.
He was young then but still had a way of taking you under his wing. I was really into what Tony was doing and I was really into his support. I had been writing since I was eleven. My last year of school, I ended up meeting professor Griff. He and I really got along, he and I wanted to do a record. I was like, “I’m going down to New York, I’m gonna make a record with professor Griff, I’m gonna go to law school then I’m gonna be Barack Obama.” By that point, I’d really been fashioning myself as a Marxist, Tony was…is still one of the few stanched genuine Marxists I know. I mean I haven’t see him in ten years, but you know…then two of us all get into the studio in Hempstead with professor Griff and Tony started spewing all this “die cracker die,” anti-capitalist rhetoric. Griff was like “whoa, this is a little more than what I bargained for.” We didn’t hear from him [Tony] again. I ran into him years later in the airport and it was nice to see him. That tapped me into places like The Brooklyn Moon, and that hadn’t even opened yet, this was 1992/93, Nuyorican was big, Firewater Poetics run by a guy like EJ Blackson who will remain a mystery but should always be noted. There were some amazing black poets doing stuff. There were two schools going on at that time for young black poets. There was the Dark Room Collective who went on to make very interesting stuff; a lot of them are the most successful poets and known now. Then there was the stuff going on in New York. It was almost as if the Dark Room Collective was consciously reacting against or moving in a different direction in reaction to the Black Arts Movement and we had decided to follow in the “tradition” of the Black Arts Movement and of course those stratifications later on became irrelevant as people continued their craft. At that time, that’s the way it was. I was part of the highly political
camp but in contact with the dark room collective. Those guys focused more on craft and I was more interested at that time in rhetoric than craft.

**AA: Was one more academic?**

The dark room collective was way more academic. They were based out of Harvard, not the entire collective went to Harvard but they all started there. That’s where the meetings took place. I grew up between two households. My mother was a professor at Harvard and an academic in general to a certain extent; I was reacting against all that. I was certainly anti-academia in many different ways.

**AA: Then you became a professor.**

Well you know…[wiping his brow and chuckling] There’s a sort of long tradition of all that. Anti-academics who are academics. That was the start of it all for me. These streets were my institution for poetry. I was in New York for 4 years before I went to graduate school. I wanted to go to an MFA program that was very conservative so that I could be challenged and test all these radical ideas I had learned. I wanted to get my craft down and know my craft. I was expecting much more of an adverse reaction than what I got. I sort of got “oh, this is very interesting” but it was incredibly informative and the stuff with David Ferry was incredibly informative, his Introduction to Formalism and getting to understand that world, which is something I’ve always stuck with. Something that I worked hard with David Ferry on was playing with metered work in other time signatures. What happens when you slap iambic pentameter on a 4/4 beat or a 5/7.
AA: So applying a musical sensibility to the poetry, deciding where the fall in the musical bars?

Yeah, more or less. And what happens when you take established literary metered structure…take that template and put it on a musical template. Which are different. And then working with someone like Vijay who’s shifted the musical template, so now you’re not even on a western musical template. Something very ridged like iambic pentameter and slapping it on that, you get these really interesting combinations.

AA: How did you first hook up with Vijay [Iyer]?

We met at the House of Blues in Harvard Square. That was 1997 and I was touring my first record and he was playing with a California based band called Midnight Voices. I was 27, he was 26. Then several years later he called me up to work on our first project (In What Language?) and in that project I wrote poems that were formalist poems mashed up on his rhythm such as Iraqi Business man is iambic pentameter.

AA: One thing worth noting is your conception of providing an overall narrative stringing together individual narrative works. It is so captivating.

I have to give myself assignments. I started doing that I when I was writing on my own at school. Especially if I was working on poems, I would work on a series or a concept. I first began by trying to create a new American mythology where I would mash up colonial figures with Europa gods and have them having this discussion. Ogoons snubbing Paul Revere, calling Revere a “sucka”…well maybe a little more complicated than that. And every since then, I’m kind of addicted to giving myself assignments.
AA: Structure helps you work and that is the way a lot of jazz musicians work.

Poets with a jazz senility have a similar way of working in the manor of discipline.
Both are also often intellectuals, which I believe may be a bridge between the two communities.

Both fields have been highly disciplined fields since their inception. I guarantee you most poets at some point in their life wish they were musicians and most jazz musicians at some point wish they were poets. You hear it all the time, jazz cats will say: “man the shit you played right there, man, that was poetry” and the poet will say “man that thing you read right there man, that was jazz”. They’re always projecting their discipline on the other. And that rhetoric’s been around for a long time. They exchange is natural. It’s a historical thing, free verse and new poetry of the 20th century met with jazz at just the right moment, just when jazz beginning to break open its structure. Free verse had been around already for 50 years but it was really coming into its own so it was a natural combination.

AA: Here in particular. New York being the epicenter of it all.

Well sure! The whole beat movement! New York, Chicago, San Francisco. San Francisco was very important. Those things were very popular, the underground scene. It was sort of like the natural combination of disco, reggae toasting and what people were doing before hip-hop started. There are these natural elements that were around each other and automatically fused. That fusion was actually more precise and more concise, and that’s how you get hip-hop. And that happened also because all of those art forms were new. The reason why we didn’t automatically get a new genre when poetry and jazz met is
because poetry specifically had already been around for five millennia. Why poetry always remains its own entity and continues to break into the different fields it visits and shapes…poetry will always be poetry because it’s the oldest form there is, in terms of words.

AA: That’s why you consider yourself a poet before a spoken word artist.

Fuck yeah, with conviction. Do you know what the top selling spoken word record is in the world? John F. Kennedy’s inauguration speech, that’s spoken word! Spoken word is exactly what it says it is. Have you even seen the Grammy list for spoken word? I’m surprised Barack Obama didn’t win a spoken word award.

AA: You’ve mentioned that the jazz community eventually accepted you.

We had been playing with jazz musicians since the early 90s, it was all in the spirit of carrying on the Black Arts Movement. We were in New York, we were in the same venues; it was all on purpose. The Nuyorican is a Nuyorican because the Nuyorican was a Nuyorican. I’ve been in punk bands, funky bands and hip-hop bands, starting from age 14 but I don’t call myself a musician. It took me a long time to figure out what key I was playing and that didn’t happen until I started working intensely with jazz musicians and it really didn’t kick in until I had to start gigging and was picking up jobs as an accompanist to jazz musicians and then it gets to the point where you better know your shit or at least know the same map everyone’s on. Most jazz musicians who are interested in working with writers, who are involved, the experimental traditions, like poets, are open to a variety of musical forms and written forms. So they’re willing to integrate a lot
of stuff, so the idea of wanting to integrate poetry and jazz has already stayed, its something that has been done. God knows it has, and not always with good results either, some of its cliché and down right fucking terrible.

Both poetry and jazz are economically in crisis, I mean severe crisis. The music industry’s in already in crisis…The economy’s in crisis, the music industry’s in crisis, the publishing business is in crisis, and at the bottom of all that is this shanty town called “poetry and jazz.” People are always looking for new ways to make things interesting and possibly economically viable in addition to what it means creatively. I mean these are all creative people and its naive to think that some who says “I do it just because I gotta do it” is just saying that. They do because they gotta do it but also because it works somehow. The jazz crowd was trying to tap into the hip-hop audience because they thought that would be a way to reach another market.

AA: We then turn to such hip-hop producers who sample jazz records…

They hit the CTI catalogue hard! Bob James, that dude is gaping! They really hit that catalogue hard. That was the late 80s early 90s and since then it just grew into this jazz fetish. Stones Throw [record label] is based on that. And that’s what’s interesting too in terms of hip-hop and jazz… how the cultures generationally hit. You got jazz players and hip-hop kids. So you got the jazz musician then you get the offspring who is (rapper) Nas. And on the same level and you get jazz heads that have these kids who are these hip-hop heads. Everything that their parents did with jazz, they did with hip-hop. A lot of us think may think “I will never be able to fully prove my blackness by being black because I’m not black but I will prove my blackness by knowing everything there is to
know about this particular art form that I’m in love with.” That’s my social take on it but in their reality they really love it and just want to be accepted and the way you get accepted is how any fan goes about it, know everything, know as much as you can about that subject.

[We then turned towards chatting about his more recent medium of expression, using the theater. Stage presentations of poetic works]

I really got into the medium of the theater with our [Vijay] first project. Still Life With Commentator and In What Language? were both much more theatrical than the more recent project will be. [The Veterans Project] will be more of a musical presentation. Still Life With Commentator was essentially an opera and it left me feeling uncomfortable. I am more comfortable in a musical venue so we’re approaching it more from that, from the realms we know. We’re interested in reaching out to the veteran’s community and the non-veterans community, which is everyone. We want to create another pathway for the dialogue between veteran and non-veteran, which is going to continue for the memory of this war, which isn’t even fucking over yet…its 10 years deep…well 7 years deep. It’s only been not cool to go to war for the first time in human history on such a large scale, since Vietnam.

The largest peace protest in the history of humanity was for this war. In terms of one moment. One 48-hour period. Of course, as Greg Tate pointed, “then everyone went home” and the war went on and nobody was prosecuted. But I still think that’s a really important moment. There’s a lot being done. It’s one of those subjects where it gets saturated, so it’s important to find new angels. Which is why I thought that working with
dreams would be an interesting way and a common ground that both veterans and non-
veterans share, everyone has dreams. In those realities, the “you had to be there” factor is
muted. Every dream has an equal amount of intensity when you’re in that subconscious
or unconscious world.

AA: Has working on this project changed your scope on this war or reaffirmed your
perspective?

ML: Everyone is supposed to support the troops no matter what right? A lot of people on
the left have dealt with that by deciding that nobody is there by choice that everyone’s
there for economic reasons. It’s much more complicated than that. Nearly everyone that
I’ve interviewed has said that they wanted to be a soldier since they were a little girl or a
little boy. Shit, I wanted to be a soldier when I was a boy. It’s facing those realities that
people aren’t born politically corrected. Some of this “going to war” stuff is a real
impulse that people have and of course it’s something that we’ve had for centuries.

AA: What is the connection between academia’s role in the music and the
jazz/poetry connection and some of the underground archival labels like Stones
Throw.

Academia can threaten art forms but in some ways in absolutely vital. Collecting and
keeping art forms and not just that but also giving it out…and all these other labels that
find them and give them out again. It’s huge!

AA: I recently heard a Madlib [producer] mix tape of music he ripped from India.
In terms of jazz and poetry, there’s *Conjur*, which is Taj Mahal and Ishmael Reed. If you ever make it to Paris, you gotta interview David Murray. David’s probably been working with jazz and poetry consistently longer than a lot of people. There are other jazz musicians who write poetry, Oliver Lake. Then there’s the Nicki Giovanni records. She does readings with gospel choirs. Those are some classic examples.

**AA: Have you had a chance to work with [Amiri] Baraka at all?**

Yeah, he’s always been around and been real generous to the whole scene. Vijay played with Baraka for a long time. The black poetry movement of the early 90s/late 80s was a direct continuation of the tradition of the black arts movement. There were The New Black Panthers, Asha Bandele, Ras Baraka, Tony Medina, Willie Perdomo, Carl Hancock Rux, LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, Edwin Torres …these were the key players. Another great resource is Bob Holman.

**AA: I’ve already interviewed him. I’m so happy we were able to meet via Julian [Jones]. I kept running into Julian at various events so finally I asked if I could interview him. And low and behold he led me to you.**

ML: Then you’re like: “Holy shit! You’re Ted Jones’ grandson!”

**AA: Exactly, then I was like: “Holy shit you’re going to introduce me to Mike Ladd!” This is how things happen.**

ML: That’s the one thing I miss about living here [NYC], things just happen.
Section B: Meeting with Iyer

To sit down with Vijay Iyer to trace his jazz/poetry timeline became the next conquest. And I had the chance to reach out in person. Two months shy of two years after I sat down with Mike Ladd, I attended the American debut of the veterans project at Harlem Stage. I hadn’t seen Ladd or Maurice Decal since Summer 2010, and I was prepared to pitch an interview to Iyer. The performance was breathtakingly visual, potent and moving. The award-winning pianist has certain degree of stature and definite aura of presence, whether he is speaking or playing music. I learned that his trajectory into music is also undermined by his place in academic life; it’s something he wrestles with as an artist and an educator. As a creator, he is quite busy, balancing solo and trio tours, and numerous other projects (as discussed below). I also learned that Vijay Iyer was a member of the musical ensemble that accompanied Baraka during his recitation of “Somebody Blew Up America” at the 2002 Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival. The reading sparked a sharp controversy on behalf of the political and “bigot” undertones of certain passages. Baraka was asked to resign as Poet Laureate of NJ. After refusing, the state eliminated the position entirely since they could not force him to vacate it.
AA: Do you remember the first time that you worked with a poet?

It was probably in the Bay Area in 1994. One catalyst, well I guess there was an atmosphere where I saw it happening and sort of got pulled into it in different situations. My first experience as a listener of anything like that, I just remember a few albums that I had in undergrad [Yale] that I listened to a lot. One is *Fire Music* by Archie Shepp, where he has that piece about Malcolm. And his voice is so killing, his delivery is like Robeson, that stentorian kind of vibe. Another is a Julius Hemphill Big Band record, I don’t remember what it was called, it might have just been called Julius Hemphill Big Band, I remember it has this Roy DeCarava photo on the cover of these dances, it’s probably the only one that came out, that such album. There’s a piece with a poet on there called “Drunk on God,” it’s really great. I remember those very vividly. When I moved to the Bay Area, “Oakland” was a scene. The hip-hop nexus was kind of very active, the hip-hop/jazz nexus. So you would see emcees collaborating with musicians a lot and I got involved in some things like that. I was in a hip-hop band from ’94/’95 until maybe ’99 or so, this group called Midnight Voices. Those guys were like hippie emcees; bohemians, they call themselves. It wasn’t the hardcore West Coast thing; it was more a peace and love, and vegan soul food, you know. They were avowedly intellectuals and activists and they came from a tradition of that. So there was this continuum. There was some stuff that was like rhyming and there was some stuff that was like poetry. And we did some theatrical projects together. One of the emcees name is Will Power and he is best known now as a theater artist. He moved out here [NYC] the same time I did and he was on the scene for a while and had various teaching gigs. He just took a job in Texas,
just a few months ago. But he’s done some pretty high profile, pretty theatrical works that kind of got subsumed under this jive rubric of hip-hop theater. Which is not really…I’m not really sure what that is. It’s just a classification by race [laughs] is what it is. He would do these versions of *Esclus*, but told in the language of his community. He grew up in the Fillmore district of San Francisco so it was kind of retold from that setting and there would be a lot of rhyming and word play and dozens, and that kind of thing…in the African American *orature* tradition. So some of the projects that I did with him and Muhammad Bilal, who’s the other emcee out in the Bay Area were that orientation. Muhammad’s claim to fame was that he was on the San Francisco version of the Real World on MTV. He was the “black” guy on the show.

**AA: He announced this at shows?**

He didn’t have to! In the 90s…that’s how we got the gigs, in fact. So, he parlayed it into a career of doing motivational speaking at college campuses around ethnicity and race, diversity, and education, and basically became an activist. And if there were a demand, a speaking engagement would be paired with a live show of his band. So that was one way that we traveled as a unit. Around that time, I was doing a lot of things in the Bay Area. I was connected with the Asian improv scene, a collective of politisized, basically revolutionary Asian American creative musicians, they’re Marxist and community music activism were one thing. My first two albums were on that label. But they did a lot of things that were transmedia, which would involve text and maybe video, maybe dance. It was not like “listen to this Chinese instrument in jazz,” it was more like, “we’re a
community of color, united in struggle with other communities of color.” So that’s what it was about. There would be pieces about the internment camps, about remembrance of Hiroshima and stuff like that.

**AA: That impacted you…**

I was involved! More than impacted. Kind of created a context for me to do a lot of things. So when I first met Mike Ladd was actually on tour with Midnight Voices. At House of Blues, we did a double bill with him and that ended up…I remember very clearly.

**AA: What was your impression of him?**

I was pretty blown away. It had so much mystery to it, so many layers, and a lot of space in it. There was a real playful and light vibe in Midnight Voices but it was also a band that was having fun and stretching. With him it was more a unified vision. He had a band, and it was a really odd arrogate. There were electronic elements, there were live instruments, there was a guy who played cassettes, who played tape loops, this guy Bruce…so it had this real textural ambient…and really finely crafted stuff really spacious and mysterious. He was playing the synth. It was around *Easy Listening for Armageddon*. Then I was like “whoa” this is some other shit. And like I said, I was connected to this community of bohemian, African American poets, activists, artists, yoga instructors [laughs] in the Bay Area. It was loose over there, a different vibe. It’s sort like putting life
first out there, which is good. The other thing is touring with Steve Coleman, he had connected with a bunch of emcees who could free-style for days. Some of the baddest emcees I ever met. Like Cocai, a group of guys from D.C. But also, Black Thought, so he was on album that Steve Coleman put together It was around the beginning of The Roots. The first Steve Coleman and Metrix album had a few emcees on it, a few from D.C and a couple from Philly. It was a studio album. I don’t know if it was as successful as an album but they ended up doing a bunch of touring so my first exposure was in spring of ’95 on a tour a did with Steve. The first overseas tour, because I had done some stuff with him in the Bay Area when he came to visit in late ’94. I stayed in graduate school but phased out of Physics around ’94/’95. So Steve was open to experimenting with voices, basically building anything with anybody who was willing to create in the moment. So that was a real education for me, to see that in action, and to participate in it. So some of these things we did on Live at Hot Brass, in ’95 on BMG France, there was a three-disc set that we did of live recordings, and I’m on one of them. But I hung out for all three; it was basically a week in Paris. So some of these emcees from D.C were involved in that, and that was where I saw it in action, these guys free-style all night. It was unbelievable. Also, sometime around ’97 or so, I got to work with Baraka in Oakland, and that was actually my first encounter with him. Some people who were curating events in Oakland, I think Concepts Cultural Gallery or maybe the Oakland Museum or maybe both, they put on an event at this place called the Upper Room.

**AA: A small venue?**
Actually they had moved to a big place, it was actually a converted gym or something. There were a few hundred people there. But it was such a crazy night, man. So they just paired us with him, it was me and Kevin Mingus, one of the grandsons of Charles Mingus, he’s from pre-Sue Mingus so she doesn’t really include him in the family…So Kevin and I, basically improvise a set with Baraka.

**AA: Completely improvised…**

As I recall, yeah. I think we might have opened as a duo playing like, “Flute African,” or something like that but I also remember at some point I turned around and there was Price Lachet, and he had kind of crept on stage with his bass clarinet and was sort of lurking [laughter] it was sort of weird. But it was great to connect with him [Baraka], and when you’re dealing with Baraka, you’re dealing with history. Everywhere you go, he’s already been there, and there’s a community that as sprung up in his wake. So now they’re all there to embrace him. I remember one time; we played a Bowery Poetry Club (’02 or ’03). And all these old friends of Allen Ginsberg showed up, they were all gay, Jewish and in the 60s and 70s [laughter] to talk to Baraka, and he was just all chummy with them and it was just crazy [laughter] and he was cracking these jokes, repeating these jokes that Ginsberg had told him on his death bed. [Laughter] So stuff would happen like that everywhere, that there’s somehow, at some moment, he was this galvanizing force in a community and somebody from that moment comes back into the fold, or returns to reconnect and suddenly you’re plugged into that legacy. Like, “whoa,” this isn’t just like jamming with a poet, this is like…you’re part of a history of ideas, and
you’re part of a history of a community, so that was really…that was wild. I met him in Oakland. I gave him a bunch of my CDs, well I actually only had two CDs at that point. I gave him my 2 albums. Then when I moved here (NYC) in 1998…I heard from him…and he’s like, “I reviewed your album for this German Marxist publication,” [laughs] and I’m like “what!” So every now and then, I’d hear from him or just run into him somewhere. I’ll never forget. In 2001, right after 9/11, I got a call from him and he was like “we’ve got some gigs in Africa, do you want to come.” It was actually like going to the Cape Verde Islands, off the West Coast, they’re a former Portuguese colony and he had been involved in their struggle for independence, because he’s done everything. So, yeah, I went.

**AA: Who was in the band?**

Rudy Walker, this guy from Newark, was it Wilbur Morris…there’s a picture of us in his book, *Digging*. And then I started gigging with him pretty regularly. He’s [Baraka] someone who’s had a lot of encounters with people, and has known a lot of musicians for many years so I’m sure he’s worked with everyone over the years…I was in his band. He had a band called Blue Ark and I was in it, we did gigs around town, and sometimes out of town. It wasn’t that he gave us a lot of instruction, actually everyone else in the group had been with him for decades, including his brother in law, who’s kind of a crooner, like he can sound like Johnny Harman, and this saxophonist named Herbie Morgan. You know he [Herbie Morgan] went to high school with Wayne Shorter in Newark. And actually had some similarities. He’s on *Sir Lawrence of Newark*, that Larry Young
record; he’s a tenor player on that. So at times, that band would include Feron Aklaf, Andrew Cyrille, Reggie Workman, Brian Smith, different cats. But it was all pretty strong elder musicians. Andy McCloud did it. Actually, two bass players I knew who I worked extensively with him [Baraka] passed away recently in the last several years…Wilbur and Andy. Anyway, mainly just had a lot of experiences on the bandstand with them. And spontaneous ones like when we do two or three sets at Bowery Poetry Club, we’d just arrive at some things, we’d have to make it work.

AA: Did he make eye contact with you guys?

Yeah, it wasn’t like he was above us or anything. [Laughs] I remember that day…remember when he performed that 9/11 poem at the Dodge Poetry Festival, then some days or weeks later, somehow…so I was on that gig. I remember…that was with Feron, who was on bass? Seems like a lot of possibilities, and they can all be right. But I remember that music was really…for him there was something almost nostalgic about it, compared to some things he’s done in the past. If you listen to what he did with Sun Ra or the New York Art Quartet and that’s one thing. Or even what I did with him in the 90s that one time.

AA: The poetry or the music?

The overall structure of things. We would play music by Coltrane and Monk and Duke Ellington. So it was actually…we could stretch it and do anything we wanted with it, but
that was the foundation. It wasn’t our own music. It wasn’t open improvisation either. It was actually like great black music. We actually did something with a Stevie Wonder song, “All I Do.” That was for the Shani Project. You know they had a daughter that was killed; she was murdered by an ex or something; something really out. So that project was about her, or for her. And she was my age. It was dedicated to her, we did a bunch of pieces…Anyway, what I was remembering about the Dodge. It’s poets there but specifically a lot of white folks. So it’s a pretty…it’s that situation that people of color find themselves in, where you’re like [looks around the room] and like…[laughs] so I just remember he was cracking jokes about it, when we were about to play, he came around. We were sitting at some dining table, and he was like “10 minutes till show time, all the negros and Indians need to get to the stage right now,” [laughs] He was just cracking jokes all the fucking time, so funny! But also dead serious. Because he’s someone so rooted in the history of activism and innovative to that degree in that many fields. As a playwright, as a poet, as a performer, as a community activist as a scholar and critic. I mean, there was an event for him at the Schonberg Center a few years ago when he turned 70? How old is he now. They’re all these panel discussions in his honor, about each of those fields that I mentioned. So, it was like, this guy has done, not only just done all that stuff but impacted each of those fields to such a degree. That’s just badass. That’s beyond “well that guy can do a bunch of stuff,” its like, “this guy is a motivating force in all these different fields,” that almost never happens [laughs]. Like in history, that almost never happens. So he’s, just this amazing, important person, in America [laughs]. So it was just so thrilling to be a part of that, to be connected to that and to be embraced by him. And he really came to enjoy my music, too. Like he would come to my gigs and
continue to write about my music. I mean, just to see him continually engaged in the world… I remember the day after that first gig that I did in the 90s in Oakland, I went to Yoshi’s to hear Eddi Palmieri and I ran into him [Baraka]. So he, and Amina were out there, so I ended up sitting with them and just like sitting with them, next to him and experiencing the music with him, it’s like “this guy has the soul of a poet.” Even just in his minute outbursts to the music, the way he would respond was like, yeah… he’s tapped into something, he’s really channeling this ancient energy. It’s really amazing… it’s not like he told me what to do and what not to do, and I wouldn’t even say I got advice from him. It was more like he was a role model, and somebody who nurtured me.

AA: Can we say that there can be a line drawn between that, and the projects you’ve done with Ladd? His inspiration. Or would you say that those come out of the experimentation in the Bay Area?

It’s a continuum, I guess. I remember when Mike and I were working on In What Language, he [Ladd] came to some of the shows I did at with Baraka at Bowery Poetry Club. Those were electrifying moments for him [Ladd], too. Because Baraka is an incredible performer… Hands down. He can go, and has gone, toe to toe with some of the most electrifying performers that ever existed, like Albert Iyler. [Laughs] like he can just bring that. It’s like the energy of a preacher, someone who can just galvanize a whole room and activate, and reach everybody in the room. That kind of thing. So you learn so much from that, which isn’t something that you can teach, or talk about… [laughs]. But I think his way of living with music and performing in conversation with music was really
influential. Because it wasn’t like, “ok this is a song, and these are the lyrics to the song, we’re gonna sing it,” it was like “this poem is going to orbit this piece of music, or inter-penetrate, or infect or invade…just be in conversation with it. So, then he could basically almost atomize the poem, break it up into shards and fragments, and just invoke any one of them at any moment. He was very free with his own texts. And the way would cycle back to certain figures was very solistic…He’s someone who’s been around music, and that speaks through him. He has a very musical sensibility and I think Mike is very influenced by it. So when we first started creating that stuff…I remember what his [Ladd] was like, and still is like. He also had a very organic relationship between text and music that wasn’t like “I went to the store, the other day,” it wasn’t like, A-B-C type shit.

“Mysterious” is the word. Very…there’s a lot of conviction in it but there’s also a lot of mystery in how the text connects to the music. It can just sort of live there, without having to fit into a meter or anything or even rhyme. And then through him, I started getting into other antecedents, like the Last Poets, and definitely Gil-Scot Heron. And his project that was definitely a big influence on In What Language? is Ishmael Reed’s Conjur. Yeah that shit is killing. You know because you start to see these other ways for poetry to unfold with music and how music can support the structure of a poem. Even if you listen to “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised.” You know I played that for a classroom once and I said “what’s going on here,” “well they’re grooving their asses off and this guy is saying this poem,” “alright but what else?” Listen to it again. “Oh actually, every time he says this one line, they change keys,” how about that. How there’s a drum fill, you know? Ok listen to it again, “alright so there’s no other instruments besides bass, drums, and flute,” they’re all orchestrated so that no ones in anyone’s way.
[laughs] So the more you listen to it, you say “oh, there’s a lot more here that meets the eye, in terms of just…there’s something casual about it but its also something very organized. It’s very specific and deliberate. What happens when, and how. You know? So that was a nice, to see that that could happen. It doesn’t take much, but enough, to create moments of synchrony and unity in the ensemble with the poem in the ensemble. Not over, but in. In the band. So that it’s actually functioning in the same way as all the other musical elements…NOT in the SAME way but two equal…it has an equal role. So it doesn’t overshadow it and it doesn’t get drown out.

**AA: And this became a model?**

It was one such model. We had a lot of points of reference. We really just wanted to reach into everything we knew to create something…it wasn’t about “this needs to sound like, this, this and this,” but actually, “this needs to tell these stories, this needs to address these issues,” that was the real goal. And still is. That’s how we make our choices. Is this actually serving…is this doing what we hoped to do in this project. If I have a burning guitar solo here, or is it just standing in the way. So, it was that kind of thing. You make choices based on these larger directives. It’s actually really empowering to do that, because the music is in service of something larger…I sit down with the poems, with my different toolboxes. Some of which are purely electronic. Some are purely compositional. It’s organic. It’s a lot of trial and error. There’s a lot of shit that doesn’t work. And a lot of things we try in rehearsal, a lot of it is in rehearsal. Like I’ll have a few different options. I’ll say “well try this…” and we’ll try it, sometimes it’ll work and sometimes
we’ll be like “well I don’t know…okay,” but then Mike [Ladd] will hear it and say “well you know what works better, this poem,” so then suddenly a piece of music is transformed because it’s brought into contact with something that I hadn’t seen foreseen, you know.

**AA: Do you have time to absorb the poetry?**

Oh yeah! That’s a big piece of it for me, is that I’ll just sit and stare at this stuff. But also, it goes back and forth. I’ll send him music, too. And he’ll sit with the music and write to the music.

**AA: So it works in a number of different ways.**

Yeah, and you can hear it in the pieces, too. They’re a wide range of manifestations. Because also, like we’re an ensemble. So it’s like, what can the ensemble do? Sometimes, I’ll write some intricately orchestrated stuff for the ensemble, other times I’ll just make a beat on my laptop. And we’ll just create something with it, or not and just make it that and a voice. Other pieces are just piano and voice, other pieces are just a capella voice. It’s a lot of different things.

**AA: You write all the libretti, the sung portions of the music? Or has he [Ladd] written those?**
No, those are all improvised…but it would also kind of coalesce over the course of a lot of rehearsal and development, to something that repeatable, with tolerance for a lot of spontaneity and variation. So something that would have an identity but would also be created in the moment.

AA: And your piano parts? The same deal?

Yeah. It’s the same deal, there are aspects that are…each track is a different story.

AA: It’s difficult to tell what is improvised and what is not.

Right, well that’s not the only reason why. The other reason why is, “what does improvisation sound like?” There’s something unknowable about whether something was or was not decided in that moment.

AA: Conviction helps

I don’t know…it can go either way in both cases. So, I think that without some… there’s no....You kind of have to have some a priorien (further) knowledge of what’s happening. Because I found that people don’t, people don’t know that. People don’t hear it as improvising; they just hear it as sound. I think in jazz, there’s a sort of, a set of assumptions that allow people to accept what’s happening. Like “oh well that must be the head because they’re all playing it in unison,” all right that’s fair because it’s highly unlikely that people are going to improvise something in union. But what if they weren’t.
What if it wasn’t all in unison? The head. Then another hallmark of it being composed is that it repeats. Okay, what if it doesn’t repeat. Then are you on your own, is it just…then basically its unknowable. I find that it’s actually kind of nice to play in the experience, may-be you don’t know that there’s anything composed happening right now, then suddenly it stops. So a moment of synchrony, synchronous action is a hallmark of premeditation of some kind of plottedness.

AA: Is that studio decision or is that a page decision. Or post-production.

Well I mean in performance. So, you know if it happens in performance, suddenly, something that you thought was disorder is actually the opposite. So, it’s kind of about…the idea is not to fuck with people but to give them an experience of discovery about what people can do together.

AA: [Mike] Ladd says that “there’s a long tradition of non-academics that are academics,” and that the streets were his institution of poetry. Do you have thing to say in terms of you experience in the academic community and what you feel your role is.

Well, I don’t know. I think my entry into music is more at the street level, too. The most consistent educational musical opportunity I had was in high school. I had lots of musical training, I never had composition lessons, I only had a few jazz piano lessons, but I was also in a jazz ensemble in high school and I was also in an orchestra in high school. I had
violin lessons out the ass for 15 years. So I was in a lot of ensembles and those were opportunities to learn and to learn in the context of making music with other people. So I think I learned a lot from that, I didn’t go to “jazz conservatory.”

AA: You’re a part of it now…

Yeah, strangely. A lot of what I do…I just had this three hour pep talk with this kid this morning. Where he’s trying to face the reality on the other side, when he finishes his masters in May. What’s going to happen to him. I find that a lot of, basically my role, at least the way I see it, and in way is contra distinction to my colleges at the Manhattan School of Music for example, is that I’m trying to get them to think like artists, not like students. Put all that student shit aside and think about your relationship to the real world, and what are the ideas that are going to sustain you over the next 5 to 6 decades. You know that’s what it’s about…you better be ready for that. But they’re not guided in that way. They’re not encouraged to read. They have some h/w to do but they sort of treat it like perfunctory not as central to them becoming a person. So it’s a weird…so then its all about this athletic game of who can cut who, who can play cleaner and faster and so on, and then that create its own market, a very small and little dismal market for that, where they’re like “oo he played that over this tune,” or “he played this tune in this meter,” and blah blah blah…I’m also directing the Banff Summer Jazz Workshop, so that’s another such case. Actually, that was where I…actually there’s a concurrent to that program that’s in May and June up in Alberta, Canada. This is actually a writing workshop, it’s like a jazz and creative music workshop, but concurrent to that there’s a writing
workshop, actually a poetry workshop. So this time around, I helped instigate a little collaboration between the jazz participants and the poetry participants. I gave them sort of like an orientation workshop where…just an hour long presentation about some examples, so it wouldn’t just be…those who were interested showed up, from both sides. We listened to some of the stuff I did with Mike, stuff with Baraka, with Gil Scott, Last Poets, Conjur, and things and we just talked about it. Stressed the concepts…

AA: What’d they think?

Well it was more about what they thought…they actually then did it. They put on a whole set of collaborations which was great. It was awesome. It was one of the best things that happened that week or that month…There have been a lot of settings of poetry, settings of existing poetry, as lyric and so on…and I guess this stuff that I’ve done with Mike is more…it sort of deliberately engages the moment a little bit more. Its more about performance of poetry, and more about creating a real time relationship between text and music, which is a little different than setting it song. It’s fair to say that I have never set poetry to song as lyric, you know. I’ve always just created situations for that to spontaneously occur, that’s just more…. it’s more fragile and maybe less compulsorily, but I just find it more interesting.

AA: It’s the improviser in you…
Yeah, I mean I’m a composer, too. I’ve made 16 albums, most of which is original music, so but I guess the way that I approach these pieces and this sort of collaborative practice with Mike [Ladd] is to create environments for the pieces, or for the poems, or for the characters or for the stories to be told so that’s kind of...I just find that to be, in the context of these projects that we’ve been doing, I find that to be more productive and more alive. And it always has certain fragility in it or possibility for failure or for things to break down, and I think that...I find that important, that somehow, everything’s being recreated each time and that it’s not just “this is the song that goes like this, here it goes okay, did you like it?” its more like “let’s put ourselves in this experience again, and we’ll learn something each time, and each time it will not be the same.

**AA: So, you worked with Pinsky at The [Jazz] Standard. Any other gigs you guys did together?**

Well we did that two or three times, different things. There was something with Pinsky and Charles Simic, that was put together by Milan Simic, that’s Charles’s brother and out of that came some more things with Pinsky, he was an aspiring saxophonist at one time...So he actually has a real way with music, that Simic did not have, at all, Charles just sort of read over the music, and was kind of ignoring us, or just sort of tolerating us, but Pinsky was really in the band, that was really...he was really just right there with you there, he hears everything and he’s dealing with it. It’s more like Baraka and there’s that, he’s maybe more in that tradition, what ever that means...
AA: I was thinking of what could tie these three poets that worked together. The word “drama” came to mind in the sense that they bring characters into their poems. And drama is an element in your music that I hear. Anything to say about how drama plays into how your improvise or even how you compose. Even in your trio work.

What do you mean by drama? Do you mean narrativity, tension and release, do you mean intrigue, or do you mean grandeur and intensity. What do you mean? Because I guess all of those things that I just said are elements in my “work” that I find as priorities. What I’ll say is that more generally, that, working with non-musicians gives you a perspective on music that musician’s often lack. In terms of just sheer energy and emotion and intensity and things like that. Which isn’t just, “when you play a solo, it’s supposed to crescendo until everyone kind of have a simultaneous orgasm, and then let’s start over,” it’s not like that it’s more organic and more attune to what else…

AA: I don’t see that as drama…

No, its not. It’s not drama. It’s like watching weight lifting.

AA: I think of the textures that you bring. On top of one if his [Pinksy] poems, he sets up one poem and talks about a robot…and the drama behind that poem is evoked in the concrete imagery of a robot, and you guys immediately hone in on what could be this machinery, thinking in terms of imagery.
Yeah, I suppose so. So which group was that? That was with [Matt] Wilson and Ben Allison. Yeah, I’m not sure that was the most successful one. It was a good one but it wasn’t. I guess what it had going for it was that it was all spontaneous. So it was that everything was co created. I remember, having to work a little harder on that one than the others. I did one with Ben Alison and Cyrille, and I think the first one with Lonnie actually Milan, that was with Charles Simic, and actually Milan made himself musical director, even though he wasn’t playing, so we actually had to play “Scrapple from the Apple,” which was fine because then I was like “let’s make something out of “Scrapple,” which was cool, so we did it. And we actually kind of stretched on these tunes and then it was actually more like what I did with Baraka. Then we all would have these moments of unity. And we were in sync, it wasn’t like “oh what’s he going to do next,” you know it wasn’t like that. It was actually more like “let’s drive this vehicle, somewhere, let’s take it somewhere where it usually doesn’t go, but at least we know what we’re driving [laughs] so that to me was a little bit, it just kind of grounded it in a different way and just for me, it felt more like the stuff I did with Amiri [Baraka] so it was fun, it was easy to do. You could make any tune sound the way you want, actually, if you really are trying you can bend “Scrapple” to make it sound dismal or joyous, or spacious, or busy or anything. It’s just an excuse [laughs] it’s just a premise for improvisation, you know. That’s what it was for Bird. There’s the “head,” and then there’s the changes which somewhat were borrowed anyway. So…

AA: What other poets have you worked with?
Let’s see. Well the ones I mentioned in the bay area, there were a couple others, who every now and then, then there were these guys like Kokai, you know the guys from the Metrics, Kokai and Sub Zero, Terrence Nicholson is his real name. And there were a couple of other emcees, I did some stuff with Dead Prez, did some stuff with Das Racist, and…They’re the three main ones [Ladd, Baraka, Pinsky] and then there was Will Power and Mohamed, that was stuff that was in a continuum between poetry and “rapping.” I feel there was some Asian American poet up in the Bay Area that at least I was involved in. There was also a time…in the mid 90s I was involved in some events like a Sun Ra Tribute Concerts where people would perform Sun Ra’s poetry. And we would kind of improvise around that, so you know, that was a bit more “beat” depends on who’s doing it, but it could be…I don’t know, Baraka was grounded in that “beat” poet movement, and was one of the forces in that before he moved away from it, you can still her vestiges in that in what he does.

AA: How long do projects like Holding it Down take to produce, from start to finish?

VI: This one took longer. I think I started in 2009 and I think it started as an idea in 2008. [laughs] I remember the first crack at it was in February of 2009, when there was a show in Milan, there was a show at Harlem stage. It was all at a workshop level but the Milan concert was kind of a massive event, that was a good experience for us, just gave us an opportunity to figure the shit out, just put something together, and that was when we first
started working with Maurice. He didn’t come with us to Milan because he just had a baby. But we worked with his text. Some of the material because some of the backbone that’s in *Holding it Down*. Part of what made this project take as long as it did is that it took us a little longer to build than these other ones did, because, we really insisted that not just interview but collaborate with so that it would just be “oh we talked to a bunch of vets and did a show about them,” but actually we built this with people from the veterans community so that everybody would actually feel involved. It was kind of like, “can we build a bridge?” of some kind, or at least bringing the audience to a point of confrontation where they have to really acknowledge their level of implication in the war. Because its like, if you’re face to face with a veteran, than, you’re suddenly in this like, for one thing it sort of stops being “art.” It’s sort of like “oh, you’re actually the person that did that,” so its not just “oh, wasn’t this a sad story, but this was a person,” and it’s a person that who I sent to war with my tax dollars, you know, or a person who dropped bombs on people from halfway around the world with my tax dollars and somehow I, all of us, are implicated, and this isn’t just the aftermath, it’s still here, right in front of you, this is *it*. She’s on stage, talking to you. [laughs] then it’s like “okay.”

**AA: And she’s not in character…well she’s in character but she’s not in character.**

Yeah, it’s really uncanny. That was the most special thing about the project. That took a lot of time to get to that point where we could win the confidence of anybody enough that they could get that involved, that raw. Let alone that they would talk to us at all. They would come to trust us enough to put themselves out there and be that person. That took
time to build those relationships and find those people, and build the work. It’s not an easy feat. I’m glad it happened and I’m glad it exists…I think that it’s important to see that [the jazz/poetry movement] as a trajectory, because I think the tendency in the jazz community is to…uh…well there are these master narratives that are often missing a lot of things, and there are also these weird eruptions like episodes that are viewed as disconnect….it’s kind of like if you watch the evening news…I don’t know if there is even such a think anymore…even if you watch 24 hour news like CNN or something….and then something suddenly happens in a place called Bengazi and you never even heard of a place called Bengazi because they never talk about it on the news. So then it’s just this isolated…like what does this have to do with anything? All of a sudden you have to like, make sense of this event that has been…in a place that’s never been mentioned, you have no context for it. That’s often what happens in the history making around this music, there are these master narratives then there are these weird isolated incidents, and nobody sees how it’s all one thing. How it’s all connected. That’s kind of the importance. I’m remembering now some of the South Asian-American people I was working with in the Bay area in the late 90s, there was a kind of collective called Chaat, which basically means snacks. [laughs] It was kind of the beginning of South Asian-American identity formation and stuff, so we were kind of horsing around; it was a lot of amateurism. It was me and this woman named Sufla who plays tabla, she’s on the scene here, but back then were just nobody and so it was just people who would put on skits, then there would be some poems and some music, so I did some stuff like that…and I did some theater pieces like scored theatrical works. There’s the stuff I did with Midnight Voices, I was the musical director for that, but then when I was here,
about 5 or 6 years ago, I did this theater piece that I made the score for called “Betrothed,” it was by a woman director that I went to college with and she was the original director for *In What Language*. She would adapt literary works to the stage. So there was a series of short stories dealing with young women getting married and getting engaged, and one of them was by Jean Pella Heri the writer…South Asian-American, she wrote the *Namesake*, won a Pulitzer. So when I’m thinking of different collaborations that I’ve done with text, that to me was a theater piece, it wasn’t so much improvisation and it wasn’t even so much about playing, it wasn’t about musical performance, the musicians were hidden and they were performing…it was actually just two musicians and laptop…but that was pretty…to me I see it as part of the continuum in my own history. Like it was sculpted organically around the narrative. And she’s the kind of director that kind of is…half of it is choreography, sometimes she would just remove an entire section of text and replace it with movement. So then it was that I had to connect the dots, so I guess that gave me some kind of perspective on that process. And I also did some film scoring. And that was another experience where creating music in service or a larger narrative, a larger purpose, thinking about the energy of the story telling, that was really crucial. I learned so much from that, which then impacted my own instrumental music.
Part 2: Voices from the Jazz/Poetry Foot Soldiers

Many composers within the jazz and improvised music spheres continue to set poems to song. It’s difficult to make the distinction a composer sets poems to song. Vijay Iyer claims that he doesn’t “set” poetry as “lyric” but rather his work with Mike Ladd “deliberately engages the moment a little bit more,” with emphasis on “performance,” and “creating a real time relationship between text and music.” He continues stating that he has “never set poetry to song as lyric,” and instead, “created situations for [the relationship] to spontaneously occur. This distinctly “jazz” composer’s approach to jazz/poetry (incorporating spoken word and sung lyric) is a growing family with many different ideas being tossed around. Saxophonist Mike Zilber composed and released a song-cycle entitled The Billy Collins Project where he pairs folk-jazz with various poems by Billy Collins.

What I saw as inspiration for my melodies was the actual way he [Billy Collins] wrote the poem because I felt that it reminded me of jazz, in that it was very deceptively simple on the surface but there’s an awful lot going on underneath.107

Pianist Frank Carlberg composes using previously written poetry from a variety of sources, but infuses a different compositional style, drawing on a range of sources, from modern classical art-song, to Thelonious Monk.

A lot of the texts that I have set are written by masterful poets, they don’t need my music for anything. I compose using poetry because I am a musician, and it’s natural for me to do these things.108

107 Michael Zilber, interview by the author, 12 July 2010, skype interview converted to a digital recording.
108 Frank Carlberg, interview by the author, 1 July 2010, New York, digital recording.
One composer, slightly younger than Frank Carlberg, but greatly influenced by him, is
Sam Sadigursky, composer of the “Words Project” series.

The spark and the defining thing in any music that I like to listen to is that it’s in the moment and that it’s going to be different every single time it’s played. The artist is reacting to the situation. It’s like you’re talking to somebody, you don’t want to talk to someone who has a canned set of things they say no matter how profound they are.109

Drummer and bandleader John Hollenbeck is a composer who recently reworked Kenneth Patchen poems into project a studio and live project which he has brought to San Francisco, CA; the Newport Jazz Festival in Rhode Island; and throughout Europe as part of the Claudia Quintet’s 2011-2012 tour. In the studio, whether he realized it or not, Hollenbeck adopted the same ““order of operations” as Allyn Ferguson when working with tape of a previously recorded poetry recitation. Hollenbeck did not alter the tape, or have Elling re-record his parts atop the music; the composer simply used the taped recitation as the basis for his musical composition.

I approached our record label about making [the commission] our next [commercial] release because it turned out to be a bigger thing than they expected…and once I got into it I realized it would be really great to maybe even hip some people to Patchen who didn’t know about him…so just by performing the music, it could maybe get some people into his poetry who didn’t know about it before…I noticed that [Patchen] has a wide variety of genres…I wanted to get a cross section of his work. Kurt [Elling] has a lot of experience in jazz, as a jazz singer, so what he could bring to it, I think, is even more than what most poets could bring to [jazz/poetry] because he’s a musician, in terms of rhythm and improvisation. I tried not to listen to much to the Patchen records before I did the recording, but what I heard, it mostly sounded like him reading his poems over jazz happening.110

Pianist Adam Birnbaum also deals with both song cycle composition and live and recorded jazz/poetry projects with poet Barry Wallenstein. His composition for “Dream

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“Songs,” was a commissioned piece for piano/bass/drum trio that incorporated and was composed using a previously taped recitation of various poems from John Berryman’s “Dream Songs.”

Just hearing where he [Berryman] left spaces in the phrases illuminated the meaning of the poem just hearing it. I decided to use the audio and sync it up so you would hear him reading, our music would come in underneath and the then music would take over, then after that he would come back in reading. You would hear as an introduction to each song, the poem that inspired it and get the idea of how the music was linked to what was happening in the poem.\footnote{Adam Birnbaum, interview by the author, 1 July 2010, New York, digital recording.}

Barry Wallenstein graciously let me spend an afternoon looking at jazz/poetry records and chatting about the intersection. He believes that “a lot of people who do this, [perform poetry with jazz], are hiding behind some good music sometimes with mediocre words, or words that wouldn’t even, on the page, like poetry if it wasn’t recited rhythmically.”

The root of jazz poetry was not just the church, but the bebop period. When Dizzy Gillespie would just start speaking, that’s jazz/poetry. It had the rudiments of poetry. His rap was rhymed and had a kind of intensity to it, it wasn’t as oblique as the kind of poetry we [students] grew up reading in the anthologies. It was much more directed, informational. Babz Gonzales was reciting poetry along with jazz. So the line between a jazz lyric and jazz poem is very thin line. Ken Nordine and also Lord Buckley, he was a comedian, had a real rhythmic…and Red Fox they way he recites his jokes, these long rambling apparently and sometimes improvisatory ramblings and he had musicians behind him. And he wasn’t himself a singer. His comedy records are available, and on one he sings. He’s a real jazz artist. John Hicks would tell me that he loved playing on gigs when Red Fox was the opening comedian. He was very in with all the players.\footnote{Barry Wallenstein, interview by the author, 4 October 2012, New York, digital recording.}

Wallenstein also recalled his first time reading with jazz and how he developed his love for the art:

My very first time was unrehersed and a surprise to me, I was 18 or 19, I can’t remember, a student at NYU. There were a group of us who got together to talk about poetry, like an informal workshop in the afternoon, presided over by a
A wonderful poet named Robert Hasel. He said “would three of you like to do a reading in public,” I had never done it, and I said “sure.” We went to the Show Place on 4th Street and 6th Avenue and that’s when Mingus had his workshop. So he accompanied us. So I had fifteen minutes with Mingus playing behind me. And if I had a tape of it, I’m sure that I’d hate it because I wasn’t really understanding how to listen and read at the same time. But, it was a thrill and I didn’t forget it and my next occasion was a little less than 10 years after that. I was studying for my Ph.D I got in poetry and I fell in with a singer/songwriter named Tim Hardin, who wrote many hits in the 60s. He was something of a jazz musician, and hired jazz musicians: Eddie Gomez, Mike Mainieri, Warren Bernhardt, Joe Zawinul. It was being around Tim at his house and watching him rehearse with these players. And sometimes when he wouldn’t be there, I would recite and they would accompany me, one player in particular a piano player named Bill Chelf, And he, after Tim Harden, invite me down to Bermuda where he was working with a house band in a hotel. So after the shows, one night, we made a tape together. This would be around 1971-72. I loved the tape and I loved doing it with him too, there was a tabla player. So, I come back to New York and friend of mine introduces me to Cecil McBee and Stanley Cowell. And that’s when we made a first record. It was made on small, avant-garde jazz label called Acbca records, and Charles Tyler, an alto and baritone saxophone player, was the chief of this company. It was a one-person company. Then Charles Tyler became my accompanist for 15 years. We were a team into the 80s, then he moved to France and I worked over there with him and some other wonderful jazz players: Ceedee Kessler, piano player who lived in France, Didie Llave, John Betch, who worked with Steve Lacy in Paris. I developed relationships with players. I always liked to rehearse a lot so that when I got up there, it was as close to a singer working with a band as could be, without me quite singing. And sometimes I half sing, in Germany it’s called “speech singing.”

Bob Holman is a published poet, a slam poet, and a jazz/poet.

What do I like about performing with musicians? It allows more ways into the work for the audience and it gives me more to do. The edge between song and poem is, like all edges, what makes things happen, what propels things. I really like minding the terrain of text to find where the orality is in the text just as I like in performing, mining the line between orality and song.  

Two clubs that continue to nurture the connection between poetry and jazz are located in Greenwich Village, NYC. Lee Kostrinsky, poet/musician, is the co-owner of Smalls Jazz Club located on 183 West 10th Street.

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Well first off, it’s really important to know that New York City is the epicenter of jazz and poetry. That seems to vanishing somewhat… jazz and poetry and like husband and wife or brother and sister and always have been. It’s weird that you have a jazz club without a poetry club or without some kind of experimental thing going on. 114

George Guida, a poet who studied with Allen Ginsberg, heads Smalls Books, the publishing company branch of Small Jazz Club.

I remember a faculty/student party. Everyone’s mingling with his or her wine and cheese, and he [Ginsberg] was standing in the window, on top of the radiator, with his face pressed up against the glass staring at the statue of liberty. I don’t think he cared about making a spectacle of himself. That teaches you a lot when you’re 25. 115

Jane Omerod is a poet and performer who I met giving a solo reading inside Smalls.

When I do perform with a band, I chose work when I can change the words. Even without a band, I find I change the words based on my breathing, and it just changes. Different venues, different microphones, different audience. I know I’m about to pronounce a word wrong I kind of have to back step. I improvise all the time it’s not like I can’t think unless I’ve got a book in front of me all the time. 116

Cornelia Street Café also hosts jazz/poetry collaborations; solo readings; small play; and jazz performances. The venue also coordinates with David Amram and serves as his place of residency where he continues to perform and engage in the community at large.

Angelou Verga, a poet himself and Cornelia Street Café’s poetry coordinator, summarized his version of the cross-pollination.

When we’re doing poetry together with musicians, it tends to be more lyrical, more pleasing and catering to the audience as far as warranting a response as opposed to the intellectual and academic poetry. 117

Steve Wilson served as a saxophonist in the Nuyorican Poets Café house band that would often accompany open mic poets and singers.

115 George Guida, interview by the author, 10 June 2010, New York, digital recording.
The first time I did something with poetry was over at the Nuyorican, when I was working with Leon Parker in the mid ‘90’s. We were the house band for different poets. We would play a groove or a different tune. It was fun, to be able to improvise around their words, or their inflection, or their rhythm. It was very hip, and it put you in a different musical space.”  

Steve Dalachinsky is a poet and active force involved in New York City’s downtown Vision Festival. He frequently performs with jazz musicians including saxophonist David Liebman.

The whole idea it to remain in a rhythmic structure like music, particularly jazz where you are either creating a spontaneous head or you’re riffing off an existing head and you’re doing it in a continuous rhythmic circle.

David Sherr is a composer and woodwind player who was living in Los Angeles at the time that Kenneth Patchen was presenting his jazz/poetry. Sherr says that seeing the performance “changes his life.”

I was a senior in High School, the next day to my American literature class and asked the teacher if he had ever heard of Kenneth Patchen. And he brought me an anthology that had the poem that I heard, “Do The Dead Know What Time It Is?”…I saw [Patchen with jazz] at the L.A Concert Hall and I believe at the Royce Hall at UCLA…Patchen’s [jazz/poetry] was an attempt at creating real art, and I think that they did it.

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118 Steve Wilson, interview by the author, 6 August 2010, New York, digital recording.
120 David Sherr, interview by the author, 8 August 2012, New York. Digital recording.
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Sadigursky, Sam. Interview by the author. 11 June 2010. New York, digital recording.


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Williams, Martin. Liner notes to Langston Hughes, The Weary Blues. MGM E3697, 1958. LP


Zilber, Michael. Interview by the author. 12 July 2010. Skype interview converted to a digital recording.
## Discography

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALBUM TITLE</th>
<th>PERFORMER(S)</th>
<th>RECORD COMPANY</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Modern Symposium of Jazz and Poetry</td>
<td><strong>Selection: &quot;Scenes in the City&quot;</strong>&lt;br&gt;Charles Mingus (bass); Jimmy Knepper (trombone); Shafi Hadi (tenor, alto); Dannie Richmond (drums); Bob Hammer (piano); Clarence Shaw (trumpet); Melvin Stewart (voice)</td>
<td>Bethlehem - LP</td>
<td>1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At The Blackawk</td>
<td>Kenneth Rexroth (voice); Brue Moore (tenor); Dickie Mills (trumpet); Clare Willie (piano); Gus Gusterson (drums); John Hosher (bass)</td>
<td>Fantasy 7008</td>
<td>1960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borderland</td>
<td>Kenneth Patchen (voice); Modesto Briseno (clarinet, tenor/baritone saxophone); Fred Dutton (bassoon, contrabassoon); Frank Leal (alto); Robert Wilson (trumpet, percussion); Allyn Ferguson (French horn, piano, electric piano, percussion); Tom Reynolds (drums, timpani).</td>
<td>Fresh Sound Records</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blues and Haikus</td>
<td>Jack Kerouac (voice); Al Cohn (tenor, piano); Zoot Sims (tenor)</td>
<td>Hanover 5006 - LP</td>
<td>1959</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jazz Canto, Vol. 1: An Anthology of Poetry and Jazz</td>
<td>John Carradine with the Jazz Canto Ensemble; Hoagy Carmichael with the Ralph Pena Quintet; John Carradine with the Chico Hamilton Quintet; Ben Wright with the Jazz Canto Ensemble; Bob Dorough with the Bob Dorough Quintet; Hoagy Carmichael with Bob Hardaway; and Roy Glenn.</td>
<td>Righteous Psalm23:4 - CD</td>
<td>2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kenneth Patchen Reads with the Chamber Jazz Sextet</td>
<td>Kenneth Patchen (voice); Modesto Briseno (clarinet, tenor/baritone saxophone); Fred Dutton (bassoon, contrabassoon); Frank Leal (alto); Robert Wilson trumpet, percussion; Allyn Ferguson (French horn, piano, electric piano, percussion); Tom Reynolds (drums, timpani).</td>
<td>Discovery DS-858</td>
<td>1957</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kenneth Patchen Reads with Jazz in Canada</td>
<td>Kenneth Patchen (voice); Al Neil (piano); Dale Hillary (alto); Lionel Chambers (bass); Bill Boyle (drums)</td>
<td>Folkways FL 9718 - LP</td>
<td>1960</td>
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<td>My Baby</td>
<td>Ken Nordine feat. <em>The Fred Katz Group</em>: Ken Nordine (voice); Fred Katz (cello); Paul Horn (woodwinds); John Pisano (guitar); Harold Gaylor (bass); Richard Marx (piano)</td>
<td>Dot Records - DLP 3142</td>
<td>1959</td>
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<tr>
<td>New York Art Quartet</td>
<td>Amiri Baraka (voice); Roswell Rudd (trombone); John Tchicai (alto); Lewis Worrell (bass); Milford Graves (drums)</td>
<td>ESP ESPCD 1004 - LP</td>
<td>1964</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poet w/ Jazz 1958</td>
<td>David Melzer (voice); Ernie Williams (trumpet); Bob Dorough (piano); Larry Horning (bass); Chris Harris (drums)</td>
<td>SJCD 9001 - CD</td>
<td>1958</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poetry for the Beat Generation</td>
<td>Jack Kerouac (voice); Steve Allen (piano)</td>
<td>Hannover 5000 - LP</td>
<td>1959</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poetry Readings in “The Cellar”</td>
<td>Kenneth Rexroth (voice) and Lawrence Ferlinghetti with The Cellar Jazz Quintet: Bruce Lippincott (tenor); Dickie Mills and Mike Downs (trumpet); Bill Wiejans (piano); Jerry Goode (bass); Sonny Wayne (drums);</td>
<td>Fantasy 7002 - LP</td>
<td>1957</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rebel Poets in America</td>
<td>Lawrence Ferlinghetti's selections from <em>Poetry Readings in “The Cellar”</em> with The Cellar Jazz Quintet, and selections from <em>Kenneth Patchen Reads with Allyn Ferguson and the Chamber Jazz Sextet</em>.</td>
<td>El Records B0010X70V8 - CD</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son of Word Jazz</td>
<td>Ken Nordine featuring The Fred Katz Group: Ken Nordine (voice); Fred Katz (cello); Paul Horn (woodwinds); John Pisano (guitar); Harold Gaylor (bass); Richard Marx (piano)</td>
<td>Dot Records - DLP 3096</td>
<td>1957</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Weary Blues with Langston Hughes, Charles Mingus, and Leonard Feather</td>
<td>Langston Hughes (voice) <strong>Tracks 1-7: arr/con by Leonard Feather:</strong> Henry &quot;Red&quot; Allen (trumpet); Vic Dickenson (trombone); Sam &quot;The Man&quot; Taylor (tenor); Al Williams (piano); Milt Hinton (bass); Osie Johnson (drums). <strong>Tracks 8-15 arr/con Mingus</strong> Jimmy Knepper (trombone); Shafi Hadi (tenor); Horace Parlan (piano); Charles Mingus (bass); Kenny Davis (drums)</td>
<td>Verve 841 660-2 CD</td>
<td>1958 and 1990</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the Beautiful?</td>
<td>Claudia Quintet: John Hollenbeck (drums); Chris Speed (tenor); Matt Moran (vibes); Drew Gress (bass); Ted Reichman (keyboards) Theo Bleckmann (voice); Kurt Elling (voice)</td>
<td>Cuneiform Records RUNE 327</td>
<td>2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Word Jazz</td>
<td>Ken Nordine featuring The Fred Katz Group: same as <em>Son of Word Jazz</em>.</td>
<td>Dot Records DLP 3075</td>
<td>1957</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix

Section A: Various Images


Section B: Kenneth Rexroth


Promotional poster for 1957 West Coast Poetry and Jazz Festival, from the Kenneth Patchen Archives at University of California-Santa Cruz.
Photo of Kenneth Rexroth reading with The Cellar Jazz Quintet printed in *Life*, 9 September 1957, 106-107, Scan courtesy of Dick Mills.
Section C: Langston Hughes

Press clipping and concert ticket from a Langston Hughes gig with Randy Weston on May 3, 1959, from the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University-Newark
Program from Langston Hughes’s performance at the Ivar Theater in Hollywood, CA.
From the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University-Newark.
Part D: Kenneth Patchen

To the left is a poster for two performances (same day) at Los Angeles Community College on April 9, 1958. The poster on the bottom right advertises a performance with the New Bed of Roses Chamber Jazz Group in Seattle on February 27 and 28, 1959. All images from liner notes to *Kenneth Patchen Reads with Jazz in Canada*. Folkways Records FL9718, 1959.
Chamber Jazz Sextet leader Allyn Ferguson with French horn; Tom Reynolds, drum; Modesto Briseno, baritone saxophone; Fred Dutton, bass; and in the tree, Robert Wilson, trumpet; Frank Leal, alto saxophone. Cover photo from Allyn Ferguson’s Chamber Jazz Sextet’s Borderland FSR 2247, 2009, Compact disc.

Still photograph taken by William Claxton during performance on Stars of Jazz, from the Kenneth Patchen Archives at University of California-Santa Cruz.
Cardboard poster of performance at UCLA, from the Kenneth Patchen Archives at University of California-Santa Cruz.
Promotional material from the Kenneth Patchen Archives at University of California-Santa Cruz.
Press clippings assembled on poster, from the Kenneth Patchen Archives at University of California-Santa Cruz.
Program from The Living Theater series: The Charles Mingus Jazz Workshop with Kenneth Patchen, from the Kenneth Patchen Archives at University of California-Santa Cruz.
PATCHEN WITH JAZZ
Reynolds’ Jazz V plus IV

palo alto community theatre
saturday, may 23, 1959

part one
compositions and arrangements by Jazz V
Patchen – poetry with Jazz V
Patchen reading solo

WITH THIS ROSE
I thee wake. And in this room—yes, to become preoccupied with . . .
oh, I don’t know, let’s say, God’s digestion, one must be convinced
that nearer matters aren’t worth too much; responsibilities, mysteries,
devotions, are here.

intermission

TRUTH MUST IN. WE ARE THE WORK. THE MAN-MADE WORLD IS
ALL DECORATION, AND ONLY MATTERS THAT WHEN IT IS NOT
COMPLETELY GIVEN OVER TO ITS APPOINTED TASK OF PROVIDING
A SETTING OF MOST CONSUMMATE BRUTALITY, STERILITY, AND
HIDEOUSNESS, IT IS JUSTPlain RIDICULOUSLY SILLY! LOOK ABOUT
YOU — Those clothes, houses, cars — woweee!

Photographs may not be published, posted on the internet, donated, sold, exhibited or
otherwise distributed.
Call number: M5160 Container/Page 1 Box 1: 2
Note: promo material

UCSC SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVES

Program from Palo Alto Community Theater performance, from the Kenneth
Patchen Archives at University of California-Santa Cruz.
Program from Palo Alto Community Theater performance, from the Kenneth Patchen Archives at University of California-Santa Cruz.
Scanned alto saxophone part courtesy of Allyn Ferguson Music Group.
Scanned trumpet part courtesy of Allyn Ferguson Music Group.
Scanned French horn part courtesy of Allyn Ferguson Music Group.
Scanned baritone saxophone part courtesy of Allyn Ferguson Music Group.
Murder of Two Men

Scanned bass part courtesy of Allyn Ferguson Music Group.
Scanned drum part courtesy of Allyn Ferguson Music Group.
Photographed score courtesy of Allyn Ferguson Music Group
Photographed score courtesy of Allyn Ferguson Music Group
Photographed score courtesy of Allyn Ferguson Music Group
Photographed score courtesy of Allyn Ferguson Music Group
CV

Name: Alexander Gelles Ariff

Born: December 20, 1988 (Baltimore, MD)

Education

Undergraduate: Florida State University (August 2006-December 2010)

Degree: Bachelor of Arts–Music (emphasis in Jazz Studies)

Graduate: Rutgers University-Newark (January 2011-May 2013)

Degree: Master of Arts–Jazz History and Research

Awards/Presentations:

• Presenter at The Federated Department of History Student Conference at Rutgers University-Newark (2013).

• First place for best masters presentation in ACES (three minute speech) competition at Rutgers University-Newark (2013).

• Morroe Berger - Benny Carter Jazz Research Award, awarded by the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University-Newark (2011).

• Certificate from The Jazz Journalists Association’s EyeJAZZ video journalism program (2011).

Projects/Publications:

• 88.3 FM WBGO-Newark: production assistant and board operator, videographer, engineer for recorded spots, copy editor for on-air spots, and author/curator of the weekly archival blog series, “This Week in JazzSet History” (April 2009-June 2012). Also served as independent producer for “An International Jazz Connection,” which aired on the WBGO Journal (9/21/12) and “Pianist Anat Fort Talks About Israeli Jazz and The New School,” a WBGO blog feature (9/16/11).

• Liner notes: Kelly McCarty 3’s, RouxSteady (2012) and Jon Diaz-Cortez’s Not All Who Wander Are Lost (2013).