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Title: **TEN FREEDOM SUMMERS** (Cuneiform Rune 350-353)

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FILE UNDER: JAZZ / CLASSICAL / CREATIVE MUSIC

"*Ten Freedom Summers* is one of my life's defining works." – Wadada Leo Smith

"Wadada is one of the most imaginative and explorative composers in creative music. His vision is uncompromising, his methods holistic and mystical. ...He is a national treasure." – John Zorn in *DownBeat*, marking the occasion of Wadada Leo Smith's 70th birthday

"There is a deep code embedded in Wadada's music that never fails to unlock new revelations for the performer... For classical and improvising musicians alike, his music always makes us thinking musicians." – Anthony Davis, pianist, composer, Golden Quintet member

Trumpeter/composer **Wadada Leo Smith's** *Ten Freedom Summers* is the work of a lifetime by one of jazz's true visionaries, a kaleidoscopic, spiritually charged collection of 19 compositions inspired by the struggle for African-American freedom. Triumphant and mournful, visceral and philosophical, searching, scathing and relentlessly humane, Smith's music embraces the civil rights era's milestones while celebrating its heroes and martyrs. Blending improvised and notated music in a synthesis of European classical, African American, and creative music practices, the music speaks in a singular, clear and powerful voice unlike any in contemporary music.

Recorded shortly after the music's October 2011 world premiere in Los Angeles, this four-CD set features one of Smith's most significant working groups, **The Golden Quintet** with the composer on trumpet, pianist **Anthony Davis**, bassist **John Lindberg**, and drummers **Susie Ibarra** and **Pheeroan akLaff**, as well as the nine-member, Los Angeles-based contemporary classical group, **Southwest Chamber Music**, under the direction of Grammy-winning conductor **Jeff von der Schmidt**. It documents a stunning, career-capping accomplishment by a musical giant in the midst of an astonishing creative surge.

As Larry Blumenfeld wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* after attending the premiere: "Ten Years in Three Nights: A Decade's Triumph... *Ten Freedom Summers* was as striking a display of his expansive vision and his vitality. He still plays trumpet as he always has: with little vibrato and a tone that can be either boldly declarative or soft to the point of breaking... Mr. Smith had made his own statement through instrumental music. And it sounded complete."

Written over that past 34 years, each of the 19 compositions addresses a different facet of the Civil Rights movement of 1954–1964, The music honors heroes and events in a transformative period of political and cultural liberation, a period that not only shaped all aspects of Smith's life and art, but all of America as well.

"I've always thought about the meaning of my music, how I would like for it to find its meaning in society," Smith says. "So, when I began my research for *Ten Freedom Summers* and began to write the music, I experienced a deep sense of how much I personally had been touched by these people and events – they had shaped my life as a young man growing up in Mississippi. Knowing that their stories were also my story, it was easier to carry that cultural element into my composing."

For instance, Smith, now 70, vividly remembers how the murder of Emmett Till, who was the same age as Smith, affected everyday life for African Americans. "The psychological fears that many African Americans felt when 14-year old Emmett Till was brutally murdered and many activists were killed changed the way we moved through the street," he remembers. "Everyone watched out for the children, young men, and women; and from houses one could see people looking out from their windows making sure that nothing happened to you."

The assassination of President Kennedy also directly impacted Smith's life. "I was in the Army band stationed in Louisiana," he remembers. "When I went to the Day Room [where the news was on television] I saw my band master and his first officers dancing for joy. My heart sank to the floor... I could never respect those men after that; later I asked to be transferred to Italy."

These and other personal experiences as well as Smith's ability to articulate in his music the longing for freedom and justice inherent in the Civil Rights movement, led to his first composition on the subject more than 30 years ago. "In 1977, [The late composer-violinist] **Leroy Jenkins** asked me to create a composition for his new ensemble," Smith recalls. "I composed 'Medgar Evers: A Love-Voice of a Thousand Year Journey For Liberty and Justice.' That was the first time I thought about composing music to celebrate the activist/heroes of the Civil Rights movement, to celebrate some of the major events that shaped the spirit of resistance, and to celebrate in what way the United States of America was changed by this movement."

[press release continued on verso]

Unlike many other works dealing with the Civil Rights era, Smith's compositions focus not on grand themes or character sketches of individuals, but on very specific moments in history or personal memories, and seek to delve into the psychological and emotional realities of particular events. For instance, "Martin Luther King: Memphis, the Prophecy" addresses the circumstances and message of Reverend King's last public speech, whose words were largely improvised after he'd been asked to address the audience on the spur of the moment. While composing "John F. Kennedy: New Frontier and the Space Age, 1960," Smith kept the televised images of Kennedy's funeral motorcade in mind. This narrow focus gives the music purpose and emotional depth, creating multi-faceted works that see deeply into the human condition and our shared humanity, using the lens of a decade of turmoil and achievement in American history.

Although several of the pieces in *Ten Freedom Summers* date back to earlier in his career, Smith completed the bulk of the compositions over the last three years. When he finished, he had 21 separate pieces, 19 of which appear on the new release. Smith emphasizes that they do not form a suite or extended work. "That implies that there are compositional elements uniting them, that parts relate to each other," Smith says. "That is not the case. Each composition in *Ten Freedom Summers* is complete and stands on its own."

Ten Freedom Summers is instead a thematically linked group of compositions, which Smith subdivided into three smaller collections called "Defining Moments in America," "What is Democracy?" and "Ten Freedom Summers" so all of them can be performed over the course of three nights. He was inspired conceptually by **August Wilson's** Pulitzer Prize-winning 10-play Pittsburgh Cycle, in which each play chronicles a decade of African American life in the 20th century. "Much like Wilson, what I'm trying to do is give a full impression, show the psychological transformation that America achieved," Smith says. "Each piece has its own motivation, and what ties it together is the psychological thread. Rather than taking ten decades, I took ten freedom summers."

Active in creative contemporary music for more than forty years, trumpeter and multi-instrumentalist, composer and improviser, **Wadada Leo Smith** is "one of the most vital musicians on the planet today," says Bill Shoemaker in *Coda* magazine. "To say that Smith is a highly original player would be an understatement." During that time, he has led many ensembles, including **New Delta Ahkri** and **N'da Kulture**; he currently directs four—**Golden Quartet**, **Silver Orchestra**, **Mbira**, and **Organic**. His fifth **Cuneiform** release, *Heart's Reflections* (Cuneiform), a double CD with his electric avant-funk ensemble Organic, was hailed by *All Music Guide* as "a masterwork by one of the great heroes of American avant-garde jazz." In addition, he is a pioneer of unaccompanied trumpet performance with five solo albums to his credit. He has performed and recorded with a veritable who's who of creative contemporary music, including **Muhai Richard Abrams**, **Anthony Braxton**, **Cecil Taylor**, Anthony Davis, **Peter Kowald**, **Marion Brown**, **Gunter Sommer**, and **Jack DeJohnette**, among many others. His compositions also have been performed by contemporary music ensembles such as **Kronos Quartet**, **S.E.M. Ensemble**, and **California E.A.R. Unit**. He is currently Director of the African-American Improvisational Music program at The Herb Alpert School of Music at California Institute of the Arts.

Smith's work on the compositions comprising *Ten Freedom Summers* was supported by a **Djerassi Foundation** residency, a 2009/2010 fellowship with the **John Simon Guggenheim Foundation**, a commission by the Southwest Chamber Music funded by the **James Irvine Foundation** and **Clarence E. Heller Charitable Foundation**, and major support from **Chamber Music America** with support from the **Doris Duke Charitable Foundation**.

With its emotional depth and power, formal intricacy and elegance, and clarity of execution, *Ten Freedom Summers* can take its place among the landmark compositions of the past dedicated to the Civil Rights movement, such as John Coltrane's "Alabama" and Max Roach's *We Insist: Freedom Now!* More than any album in recent memory, these four CDs of ambitious, towering music—by turns majestic, tragic, joyful, and contemplative—feel like one for the ages, an album that generations of future listeners will turn to for inspiration and spiritual refreshment. A classic of American music is born.

For additional information on *Ten Freedom Summers*, go to www.wadadaleosmith.com.

PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS



Digital [High-Resolution] versions of these images and more are available for download on www.cuneiformrecords.com.

WADADA LEO SMITH BIO

Born and raised in Leland, Mississippi, **Wadada Leo Smith** got his start playing trumpet in R&B bands, encouraged by his stepfather, blues guitarist **Alex Wallace**. By the mid 1960s, he had gravitated to Chicago's burgeoning avant-garde jazz community. An early member of the seminal **Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM)** collective, Smith collaborated with a dazzling cast of fellow visionaries, including **Leroy Jenkins, Muhal Richard Abrams, Anthony Braxton, Richard Davis** and **Steve McCall**.

An esteemed educator and music theorist, Smith relocated to New Haven, Conn. in the 1970s, where he founded the label **Kabell** and launched **New Delta Ahkri**, an exploratory band that featured at different times **Henry Threadgill, Anthony Davis, Wes Brown** and **Oliver Lake**. He studied music at Wesleyan University from 1975-76, and independently developed his intricate notation system, now known as Ankhration. On faculty since 1993 at Cal Arts, where he is director of the African American Improvisational Music Program, Smith has profoundly influenced several generations of artists.

Since making his recording debut as a leader in 1972 with the self-produced *Creative Music-I*, Smith has released nearly three-dozen albums on a number of labels, including **ECM, Black Saint, Moers, Pi**, and **TUM**. In the late '90s, the **Tzadik** label began releasing new albums and in 2004, reissued a revelatory 4-disc box set of his early recordings, *The Kabell Years: 1971-79*. His output has increased dramatically in recent decades, starting with three double-disc **Yo Miles!** albums with guitarist **Henry Kaiser**, a celebrated project inspired by the early 1970s fusion of **Miles Davis**. **Yo Miles!** marked the beginning of Smith's collaboration with **Cuneiform**, which released two of the albums. Smith's output with his **Golden Quartet**, devoted to interpreting his own compositions, has been even more prolific. Launched with **Jack DeJohnette, Anthony Davis, and Malachi Favors**, the group has undergone several incarnations, featuring prodigious young players such as pianists **Vijay Iyer** and **Angelica Sanchez**.

In 2008, Smith's third Golden Quartet album, *Tabligh*, came out on Cuneiform, which subsequently released other Golden Quartet recordings. The following year, Cuneiform released *Spiritual Dimensions*, a double album featuring Smith's **Golden Quintet** and one of his larger groups, **Organic**. Smith's most recent Cuneiform release was a captivating, avant funk double album by his **Organic, Heart's Reflections**. The 4-CD set, *Ten Freedom Summers*, is Smith's 6th and largest release to come out on the label.

PERFORMANCE PREVIEW: TEN FREEDOM SUMMERS (ENTIRE – WORLD PREMIERE)

“Wadada Leo Smith's opus: The composer examines America's racial struggle in 'Ten Freedom Summers' over three days at REDCAT,” Greg Burk, *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 2011

“Composer Wadada Leo Smith will unleash his magnum opus — a three-night abstract investigation of American racial struggle — at REDCAT next weekend. As an African American born in Mississippi in 1941, he's qualified.

"When you live in the South, you're constantly part of the civil rights movement," he says. ...

... "Ten Freedom Summers" — his tribute...to the major figures in African Americans' march toward equality.

Less a story than a nonverbal gestalt in which powerful personalities and social forces interact, "Summers" offers "inquisitive psychological examinations" of figures such as Dred Scott, Rosa Parks, Justice Thurgood Marshall and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

"Wadada was absolutely right when he told me, 'It's time for these people to become American heroes, not just African American heroes,'" Jeff von der Schmidt, founding artistic director and conductor of Southwest Chamber Music, says...

...last year, when Von Der Schmidt was seeking pieces to celebrate Southwest Chamber's 25th anniversary, he checked in with Smith.

...Von Der Schmidt visited Smith's Ventura home, where the two splayed reams of sheet music all over the floor. He drove home realizing he might well stage not the usual 15-minute composition but what he calls Smith's African American equivalent of Wagner's "Ring" cycle....

Smith's compositions present a particular challenge because he emphasizes proportion and expression rather than meter and key. Von Der Schmidt dismisses the difficulty, though; he and his players know Wadada's world through hands-on experience.

"We all speak Smith," Von Der Schmidt says. "Working on his music, I'm reminded that the word 'chromatic' comes from the Greek chroma, which means 'color.' And I find a beautiful confirmation of all types of traditions — the blues tradition as well as the great chromatic tradition that goes back to Debussy and Bartók."

The music won't be the only expansive aspect of "Ten Freedom Summers." Videographer Jesse Gilbert will manipulate live visuals triggered by computer interface. And each segment will be introduced by short historical background from Facing History and Ourselves...

Smith and Von Der Schmidt toned their fund-raising muscles on "Ten Freedom Summers," resulting in support unprecedented for any of Smith's projects. ...from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Musicians' Assistance Program fund, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the James Irvine Foundation, the Clarence E. Heller Charitable Foundation, the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, Chamber Music America and Southwest Chamber Music. ...**"Ten Freedom Summers" sends an uplifting message. ..."**

RECENT FEATURES / INTERVIEWS WITH WADADA LEO SMITH:

“Ishmael Wadada Leo Smith: Looking for the Diamond Fields,” Michael Jackson, *Downbeat*, April 2012

“...Despite orchestrating a panoply of music, Smith steadily remains the unblinking eye of the cyclone. ... Smith’s prolific output and raft of associations demonstrate a talent for bringing people into his orbit while helping them discover their own path. His work reflects a strong element of freedom combined with a fierce artistic commitment, whether he’s composing a project deploying his specific theoretical strategies, or cueing directions for his musicians via authoritative hand signals. The range of Smith’s oeuvre is remarkable. ...

...Downbeat asked the thinking man’s improviser about his work. ...

[DB] You write music by hand, monk-like – the *Ten Freedom Summers* manuscript is over 200 pages – you illustrate graphic scores, and incorporate videography and poetic ruminations. Is the symbolism in *Ahkreanvention* specific, or does it have kinship with the “total art” term *Gesamtkunstwerk*?

[WLS] I handwrite my scores because of the direct power this act releases into my being. I touch the paper as the ideas and inspiration flow through me. I spread the score onto the floor and walk through it. Viewing structured elements from different positions gives me a feeling about balance, form, clarity of intent. ... You could use the term *Gesamtkunstwerk* – it may give one an idea about my form for my large multi-media work *Ten Freedom Summers* but not the meaning. No words are sung, no action takes place onstage. It is a psychological interpretation of the events pertinent to the civil rights struggle, not a pictorial or cinematic treatment that musically describes each event... It reflects spiritual conditions and cultural attitudes surrounding incidents that changed American social history. My work is in the tradition of Duke Ellington’s Sacred music, *Love Supreme* and *Meditations* by John Coltrane, or George Russell’s *Electronic Sonata For Souls Loved By Nature*. ...

“Celebrating with Friends,” *Downbeat*, April 2012

Ishmael Wadada Leo Smith celebrated his 70th birthday in style. After performing for two nights with six groups at New York’s Roulette, he served cake to his audience and cast of musicians on Dec. 16, blowing out his birthday candles with trumpet blasts. Below are [a few of the] quotes from musical collaborators...

“...There is a deep code embedded in Wadada’s music that never fails to unlock new revelations for the performer. ... For classical and improvising musicians alike, his music always makes us thinking musicians.” – Anthony Davis ...

“...I play within different styles in contemporary classical music, using extended techniques, but the sound world Wadada brings is more open and free. It was liberating...to be able to make real choices about where the piece was going in terms of sound and color. ...*Ten Freedom Summers*...was a lot of work to put together, but the payoff was tremendous.” –Shalini Vijayan

“Wadada introduced me to his rhythm-unit method in 1975 when I was 20, impressionable and raw. ... It helped me develop a signature sound, like a salmon swimming against an ocean of drumming styles.” – Pheeroan akLaff

“Ever since we began playing together in 1978, a central dynamic has been that you bring everything you have and give it all you’ve got... You keep going, no matter what, giving this music every last drop of energy, expressing the truth of who you are in conjunction with your kindred spirits. ...” –John Lindberg

“Wadada is one of the most imaginative and explorative composers in creative music. His vision is uncompromising, his methods holistic and mystical. His playing is consistently brilliant and his sound is personal. His compositions have a special focus combining improvisation with written passages of extreme sensitivity and beauty. The writing and improvisational moments are so organically linked that it is often impossible to tell which notes are predetermined and which improvised on the spot. He has introduced a unique sense of space and timing into creative music, and his silences are just as intensely felt as his sounds. **His system of notation, along with esoteric rehearsal practices, lead the performer into a magical, intensely personal world. He is a national treasure.**”

– John Zorn”

CONCERT REVIEWS FOR TEN FREEDOM SUMMERS:

World Premiere of Ten Freedom Summers (entirety): Oct. 28, 29, 30, 2011: Roy & Edna Disney/CalArts Theater (Redcat), Los Angeles, LA

“...*Ten Freedom Summers*...five hours of music over three October nights at Los Angeles’ Red Cat... **Smith illustrated the psychological impact of the American Civil Rights struggle with compositional interpretations of historical events under such headings as “Defining Moments In America” and “What Is Democracy?”** ...

Smith handwrote all the music (nearly 300 pages) for each musician, facilitating cross-pollination between the conventional and improvisational, and counterbalancing rhythmic and intervallic cells. The concept was novel even to experimentalist Davis, who timed his scurries up and down the keyboard via eye contact with harpist Alison Bjorkedal across the stage. The often-fierce Ibarra had to rein in for long stretches, but bassist Lindberg was naturally stoic and contributed impressive arco work. ...

Smith’s writing for strings was audacious. ... One instrument would gliss up as the other went down during introductory sections. Vijayan’s intimate interaction with Smith and precise intonation in the highest register during “Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society” and “The Civil Rights Act Of 1964” were utterly stunning.

The real-time visuals...suffered technical setbacks the first couple of nights but kicked in for the finale.

Smith’s trenchant playing climaxed during “September Eleventh 2001: A Memorial.” He varied his attack from intense chromatic runs that recalled Miles Davis’ fusion period or the gravitas of *Sketches Of Spain* to chilling long-tones drawn to a whisper. Smith affirmed that the battle for civil liberty was an essentially positive experience for humanity, but his writing suggested a starker legacy. ...”

–Michael Jackson, “Smith Paints Stark Portrait of Societal Struggles,” *Downbeat*, January 2012

“... Wadada Leo Smith's *Ten Freedom Summers* suite...debuted at REDCAT in downtown L.A.... Employing both Southwest Chamber Music, a nine-member chamber ensemble conducted by Jeff von der Schmidt, and his own Golden Quartet, *Ten Freedom Summers* follows a twenty-one-point historical progression over the course of three performances, with Friday's concert progressing from "Dred Scott: 1857" to "John F. Kennedy's New Frontier and the Space Age, 1960." The jazz group...performed the first two compositions and then more or less alternated movements with the chamber ensemble on stage left. **Occasionally—awesomely—they overlapped in a conversation that teased at pushing the "double quartet" format from Ornette Coleman's 1960 classic *Free Jazz* to a new frontier.** ...

A video projection by Ismail Ali and Robert Fenz that accompanied much of the performance showed live video of the artists onstage enhanced with psychedelic graphics. ...three historical photographs incorporated into the video served to helpfully locate the music in the set. ... **Smith's impressionistic approach to memorializing the Civil Rights movement... distinguishes itself from currents within the free jazz tradition. Smith separates himself from the strand of free jazz that unsubtly puts its political message at the fore.** ...

Despite the fact that the music of *Ten Freedom Summers* suite is stirringly beautiful in its own right, its understated allusions present the opposite problem, namely how to understand the symbolism of evocatively titled free-form music. ...Speaking to me a day after the final concert, Smith said he asked himself while composing, **"How can you express the Voter Registration Act in music?"** ...Hidden in parts of the score...are gematria-like patterns in the scales that add up to significant numbers, such as sixty-four. But the main point of *Ten Freedom Summers*...is something less tangible, "the psychological impact the movement has on America and the world." **Smith's project does come out of the tradition of free jazz instilled with distinctly African-American politics... But it also aims for something much broader** than that. "It was not written just to explore the anger of the African-American experience," he said, "but to **explore the American experience.**" ...

Ten Freedom Summers manages to pay tribute to the Civil Rights Movement in a wholly original, wordless way that also holds up as **an astounding aesthetic achievement.** His approach to the entire project, including the song titles, was poetic, he said: "And poetry, as you know, expresses a lot with a small number of words."

—Michael Casper, "Civil Rights in Concert," *Oxford American*, November 22 2011,

<http://www.oxfordamerican.org/articles/2011/nov/22/wls/>

“...world premiere over three nights, October 28, 29, and 30, 2011...REDCAT multi-media performance space...

...*Ten Freedom Summers* radiated nothing but the seriousness of Smith's message over the duration of its performance. ...

...**The music was studded with the metallic brilliance of the horn and a piercing continuously bowed high-note on the violin.** Grace and reverence exuded from a sole quartet of the strings. ...

... **Smith sculpted his improvisations as though he were playing for the first and last time.** ...

Symptomatic of Smith's process is that the players who work with him "unlearn" how they normally play and coincide with the properties of the music he has created. ...

The films and video visualizations...elucidated the subject matter beautifully and physically embraced the theater space. ...

No matter how one approaches and absorbs *Ten Freedom Summers*, as musician, artist, historian, sociologist, activist, or born of a particular ethnicity, **the crux of this music, albeit of epic proportions, is simple. Eloquently explained by Smith, true freedom is not found or discovered because of fortune; it is earned through the persistent quality of the hard work of those who struggle to make themselves heard. ...it is the principle within their actions and words that requires deep understanding and respect.** ...

The basis for the construction of Wadada Leo Smith's *Ten Freedom Summers* emanated from artistic collaboration and cooperation among a variety of musicians, visual artists and sound engineers, each educated in a different discipline and originating from a different background. ...

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—Lyn Horton, "Wadada Leo Smith: *Ten Freedom Summers*: Report on premiere of ambitious new work from trumpeter and composer at the REDCAT Performance Center in Los Angeles, Calif.," *Jazz Times*, November 5, 2011, <http://jazztimes.com/>

"In 1977, violinist Leroy Jenkins asked Wadada Leo Smith to compose a piece for his group. ... He named the piece he handed Mr. Jenkins "Medgar Evers," after the slain civil-rights activist. In 1998, a commission from Southwest Chamber Music...inspired Mr. Smith to compose a string quartet. Again, his title paid tribute to a significant figure in the civil-rights struggle: "Rosa Parks."

That string quartet was a riveting highlight on Friday during Mr. Smith's "Ten Freedom Summers," a 21-piece work that spanned three nights in premiere at the Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater (Redcat) in Los Angeles. ... "Ten Freedom Summers" is named for a 10-year stretch, from the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision declaring school segregation unconstitutional to the "freedom summer" voter-registration drive and Civil Rights Act of 1964. **It also traces Mr. Smith's life as a composer through 34 years—** from "Medgar Evers" to his tribute to John F. Kennedy, written just last month—**to form a personal reflection on the legacy of the civil-rights movement from a musician, born in Leland, Miss., in 1941, who came of age as that history took shape.**

It can also be heard as a statement of artistic empowerment. Like his colleagues formatively affiliated with Chicago's Association for the Advancement of Creative Music, **Mr. Smith blends improvisation and form in ways that elude genre categorization.** At the Redcat, his Golden Quartet...was assembled stage right, the nine-member Southwest Chamber Music ensemble stage left. ...several pieces were played by one ensemble while the other sat silent, which could have invited uneasy tension or a dissociation of parts.

No such thing occurred, owing largely to Mr. Smith's Golden Quartet, which adheres to jazz convention only through instrumentation.

Drummer Susie Ibarra, bassist John Lindberg and pianist Anthony Davis played **mere fragments of anything resembling jazz's swinging pulse; rather, they embodied Mr. Smith's concept of "rhythm units," which can at first sound undefined but eventually—**especially through such an expansive program—prove elastic enough to convey finely calibrated tensions and releases. The Southwest ensemble's familiarity with Mr. Smith's approach...and music director Jeff von der Schmidt's longstanding embrace of adventurous repertoire afforded both common purpose and shared literacy.

... Saturday night ended with a breathtaking moment, when an extended passage from Ms. Ibarra and percussionist Lynn Vartan, playing timpani, abruptly stopped and the sound dissolved into a soft wash of strings. ...**this was communal music, with interlocking parts, contrasting timbres and harmonic convergences that lent weight and meaning.**

... "Ten Freedom Summers" was as striking a display of his expansive vision and his vitality. He still plays trumpet...with little vibrato and a tone that can be either boldly declarative or soft to the point of breaking. ... In a work dedicated to nonviolent struggle, his most emphatic moments were often his softest. ...

"Ten Freedom Summers" had a visual component too. Brief avant-gardish black-and-white films preceded each concert to bracing effect. Documentary photographs...occasionally projected on a screen above the musicians... During other stretches, abstract shapes morphing in real time ... After Sunday's final piece, a recorded snippet of Martin Luther King Jr. was played... Mr. Smith needn't—shouldn't—have included this. ...Mr. Smith had made his own statement through instrumental music. And it sounded complete."

—Larry Blumenfeld, "Ten Years in Three Nights: A Decade's Triumph," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 2, 2011, online.wsj.com

"For all the noble efforts made over the decades to effectively merge the worlds of jazz and classical music, most often the fruits of the labors remain stuck in the "noble effort" category. But there are blissful exceptions, a list to which we can now add Wadada Leo Smith's ambitious five-hour, civil rights-surveying "Ten Freedom Summers," given a moving world premiere at REDCAT...

...it helps that the...trumpeter-composer Smith...has worked on both sides of the mediumistic "aisle." His magnum opus, 21 movements spread over three nights, boldly conjoins his various impulses.

...the REDCAT stage was divided between Smith's "jazz-"minded Golden Quartet and Southwest Chamber Music. ...

Southwest Chamber, known for braving contemporary musical challenges (including past work by Smith), proved an ideal ensemble for the job. ... A wafting of minimalist textures runs through the section titled "John F. Kennedy's New Frontier and the Space Age," while the sterner stuff of post-serialist writing arises elsewhere, asserting necessary rage and indignation. ...

From the jazz component angle, **Smith demonstrated once again...that his Golden Quartet is among the more fascinating, inside-outside jazz groups around.** In this incarnation, bassist long-standing member John Lindberg was abetted by Ibarra and rigorously fine pianist Anthony Davis...sharply attuned to Smith's vision. Smith's trumpeting was alternately big and bracing -- evoking Miles Davis in his "electric voodoo" period of the '70s, but in acoustic mode -- or introspective, played with a mute.

All musical hands came together for the 21st movement on Sunday, "Martin Luther King Jr.: Memphis, the Prophecy," and **MLK had the last word, literally, as the music stopped and the late reverend's voice boomed out, "we, as a people, will get to the promised land."**

Hope, anger, abstraction and grand aesthetic ambition come to bear in Smith's inspirational work, bolstered by the charge of the new."

—Josef Woodard, "Wadada Leo Smith's 'Ten Freedom Summers,' REDCAT," *Los Angeles Times*, October 31, 2011

"Over three evenings in late October, trumpeter and composer Wadada Leo Smith premiered his sprawling opus, *Ten Freedom Summers*, at the Walt Disney Concert Hall Complex in Los Angeles. Smith's multi-media production, performed with his own Golden Quartet...in collaboration with the Southwest Chamber music ensemble, **focused on the heroes and milestones of the Civil Rights era.** Smith, who was born in 1941 and raised in segregated Mississippi, divided the work's 21 pieces into three thematic collections -- "Defining Moments in America," "What is Democracy?" and "Ten Freedom Summers" -- and performed one during each night of the premiere. ..."

—**"Wadada's Opus," *Jazziz*, Winter 2011/2012**

"1954 – 1964. ... This is World Premier music written and centered on and around this decade in history by composer, educator and trumpet master Wadada Leo Smith. ...

Part one begins... with the Golden Quartet; the trumpet representing the sounds, strife and voice of a man and a people. Space is a major player in the texture of the story of "Dred Scott, 1857"; an emancipated slave who brought suit against his oppressors for his freedom. ...

A picture of a black man speaking about the freedom and rights to vote sets the scene for "Freedom Summer Voter Registration, Acts of Compassion and Empowerment, 1964"...

There was a man unafraid to shine the spotlight on the darkness...John Fitzgerald Kennedy Jr.; a speaker of truth and justice for humanity. "John F. Kennedy's New Frontier and the Space Age, 1960" represents an ideal of inhabiting a planet with love and togetherness and as that ideal rose up, it was silenced...

Ten Freedom Summers Part Two

Why three nights? Well this is history and it certainly can't be told in 90 minutes. The music blends with the moving images in your mind making you the director, choreographer, conductor and for those of you alive to witness the atrocities and triumphs, the star.

... "Fannie Lou Hamer and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, 1964". ...Lindberg's solo on bass is phenomenal, and with Susie Ibarra joining in on drums, they are the driving force. ...The tympani and drums exchange as "Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society and the Civil Rights Act of 1964" begins with an image of L.B.J signing a document into law...

Wadada says that all of these characters say something about Americans. ...

Ten Freedom Summers Part Three

... "Thurgood Marshal and Brown vs. The Board of Education: A Dream of Equal Education"

A Love Supreme representing truth and justice for all hues gets a drum roll with the red carpet and formal announcement of arrival. ...

"The Freedom Riders Ride" as Davis' Monkish blue chords activate the Golden quartet into high speed. ...

—**LeRoy Downs, "Wadada Leo Smith's 10 Freedom Summers with the Golden Quartet and Southwest Chamber Music Ensemble.**

First Collection – Defining Moments in America," *The Jazzcat*, October 30, 2011, <http://www.thejazzcat.net>

NEW YORK 70th BIRTHDAY CONCERTS: 2011

"Wadada Leo Smith was a force in motion during the early stretch of his concert at Roulette in Brooklyn on Friday night. Stalking the stage, busily directing the output of his Golden Sextet, he gave off an air of restless intent. The exceptions mostly came when he played his trumpet, projecting in a hard, lustrous tone. In those moments he rooted himself... At every juncture he seemed to mean business.

...he wasn't coasting in advance of his 70th birthday, which the concert — part of a two-day affair organized by Interpretations...was meant to celebrate. Mr. Smith led three groups each night, mixing older pieces with a handful of premieres. On Friday the Golden Sextet pulled an opening shift, followed by his Silver Orchestra and Organic, his funk-centric electric band.

Mr. Smith has long been an active synthesizer of sound and texture. As an early member of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, he embraced that organization's dual commitment to composition and improvisation, along with its openness to non-Western forms. ...

On Friday the world-music intimations were more a matter of subtext. The concert opened with "Tabligh," a piece inspired by Sufi music. ... the murky, evil-sounding groove of Organic — a band with three electric guitarists, along with electric and acoustic bass, cello, piano and drums — felt almost like a comfort. Mr. Smith seemed to think so himself. During "Leroy Jenkins's Air Steps," from "Heart's Reflections" (Cuneiform), released this year, he faced the band and let his body sway in tempo. ... "

—Nate Chinen, "For a Big Birthday, Leading Three Groups a Night," *The New York Times*, December 18, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com>

"... Last Friday night at New York's (Le) Poisson Rouge...Smith, who played with his Golden Quartet, didn't disclose the titles of any of the pieces while on the bandstand... With the concert taking place just two days before one of New York City's more chilling anniversaries, one song was called "September Eleventh, 2001"...

Smith let the epic nature of his trumpet lines set the tone, conveying the solemnity of each song's subject, while the latest incarnation of his Golden Quartet provided extra levity. As he switched back and forth between open and muted horn... His lines can be craggy, expansive, even discursive, but they're also unflinchingly forceful, clarion.

Perhaps it's fitting that the rhythm section feeds on the energy of bassist John Lindberg... Aside from Smith, he took the evening's most cohesive solos—one particularly lyrical arco offering elicited gasps from the audience. ... With the exception of the bassist's wah-wah effects on the piece called "Rosa Parks"—easily recognizable from Smith's 2008 album *Tabligh* (Cuneiform)—the music had the feel of an acoustic set...

... His presence was commanding enough to hold the audience's attention...and when the whole gelled, the weight of Smith's music approached the gravity that his historically-charged titles suggested."

—K. Leander Williams, "Wadada Leo Smith Set Resonates in New York," *Downbeat*, September 12, 2011

WASHINGTON DC: PIECES FROM TEN FREEDOM SUMMERS: 2010

"Mississippi-born jazz composer Wadada Leo Smith has mastered the art of omission, splicing his most dazzling phrases with dramatic pauses and mysterious silences. The 68-year-old's **performance at the Library of Congress's Coolidge Auditorium...was elegant, the signature stop-and-go nature of his playing...meditative...**

Surrounded by the latest iteration of his Golden Quartet, Smith told the capacity crowd that the evening's selections were penned as ruminations on the civil rights movement, as well as 21st century "problems of wealth and problems of power." And while they may have been inspired by the grim realities of the American inequality, these largely improvised **works felt blissful and otherworldly.**

... His scores kept his Golden Quartet plenty busy during Saturday's two-set performance. Between virtuoso solo turns, bassist John Lindberg, drummer Pheeroan akLaff and keyboardist Vijay Iyer were...watching carefully for Smith's every signal. ...

... AkLaff's drumming could gracefully ascend from a chatter to a roar, as if he were merely rolling a volume knob on a stereo. Lindberg was a jovial bassist who would often play mockingbird to akLaff's rumble. And Iyer, a young jazz sensation in his own right, coaxed chiming chords from the library's Steinway and syrupy tones from his own Fender Rhodes keyboard.

During a spectacular piece titled "September 11, 2001," Iyer's sparkling Rhodes work was countered by Lindberg's liquid bass lines... All together, the quartet played with an elegance that transcended the chaos of that day.

...the evening's selections were culled from a hefty, 18-piece body of work. ...

When the four returned from a 30-minute break, their approach was more syncopated, more workmanlike. Lindberg, akLaff and Iyer pushed toward abandon, but Smith would limit his playing to singular elastic notes..."

—Chris Richards, "In concert: Wadada Leo Smith at Library of Congress's Coolidge Auditorium," *The Washington Post*, November 22, 2010

"... **Joined by his Golden Quartet, Smith enchanted a full house at the Coolidge Auditorium at the Library of Congress...**

...the room was transformed by the first crash of **Pheeroan akLaff's** drum, blessing the beginning of the set... **John Lindberg's** bass and **Vijay Iyer's** piano joined in the fray of composed freedom, the tension building slowly. ...

The next piece brought the volume and frenetic energy down to a quieter intensity, a trademark of Smith's compositions. ...The first set featured no breaks, each composition transitioning seamlessly, with directions from Smith in the form of hand signals and occasional ear whispers. ...

The second set picked up where the first had left off, featuring an eerie introduction by Vijay Iyer on synthesizer and delay/loop pedal. ...

Each composition played on Saturday night was part of an 18-part suite inspired by the early days of the Civil Rights Movement.

The entire suite...would take nine chamber ensembles and three days to experience in its entirety. ... **This set of compositions certainly reflects a period of turmoil and change...and the music presented was tumultuous and ever-changing. Through all the music's fits and oscillations, the compositional aptitude of Leo Smith resulted in a powerful statement of historically oriented but forward-thinking music that left a lasting impression.**

... Iyer is indeed one of the more creative and unique pianists in jazz today. ...Every note was at the same time complimentary and expansive. ...For Pheeroan akLaff, not since I saw the "Art Ensemble of Chicago"...have I seen a drummer as precise as he. On his unusual set featuring two floor toms...and a djembe, he gracefully played each composition and improvisation with a griot's mastery. ...

Before the concert began, there was a discussion moderated by local jazz historian and journalist Larry Appelbaum... Smith's patented compositional method, called Ahkreation, is at once an exhibition of masterful visual and musical expression. ...

—Luke Stewart, "Ishmael Wadada Leo Smith's freedom ride: Ishmael Wadada Leo Smith, Library of Congress, Sat., Nov. 20, 2010," *CapitalBop*, November 22, 2010, <http://capitalbop.com/>

“Wadada Leo Smith: The Teacher,” Franz A. Matzner, *All About Jazz*, March 14, 2011,

<http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=38888> *Excerpts reprinted with permission, Franz Matzner, AllAboutJazz.com*

Civil Rights

AAJ: *I was at the Library of Congress performance November, 2010. You performed several pieces that night from what I understand is a much larger work dedicated to the civil rights movement...*

[Wadada Leo Smith] WLS: It is called *Freedom Summers: The Defining Moments in the History of the United States of America*. The collection has eighteen pieces in it. The collection is broken down into three sections so it can be performed in three successive evenings. ...

AAJ: *Has the full piece been recorded yet?*

WLS: Only "America Part I" and "America Part II" with Jack DeJohnette and "Rosa Parks" on the *Tabliq* release. ...

This piece means that when I was growing up in Mississippi—in a segregated Mississippi—and experiencing transition from that segregated moment I felt in my heart that I would someday write about that time zone. Because of the development in United States civil liberties have been increased throughout the world because of the civil rights movement. ...my pieces include "Fannie Lou Hamer and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, 1964." There are the individuals, like Emmet Till, Rosa Parks, Dred Scott. But also there are titles like "Democracy," "Buzzsaw," "September Eleventh, 2001: A Memorial," "Brown vs. Board of Education," "Little Rock 9," "Civil Rights Act," the JFK one, all of that stuff, the Washington DC Memorial March. The names of people and events that have shaped American history. Like Brown vs. Board of Education. A landmark decision, yet unfulfilled, but nevertheless it has the mechanism there to someday achieve. The Voters Rights Act. Same thing. ...there is still a mechanism for one day having success. ... They have to undergo constant revision to become what they were dreamed about, intended, inspired to be. ...

AAJ: *I often look to the successes of civil rights movement for inspiration.*

WLS: That is the other reason why I did it, this topic of freedom and justice in a democratic society. The civil right movement has been very successful. It has transformed America. Even though things are not perfect, it has transformed it to make it possible for a Condoleeza Rice to be Secretary of State, or Colin Powell, or Ornette Coleman to get the Pulitzer Prize for music. There are lots of things that these unperfected pieces of legislation [accomplished]. They have actually provided transformation. And the civil rights movement represents that success and this piece of mine it represents that success as well. We have made quite a bit of an achievement. I'm not talking about African-Americans, I'm talking about Americans.

AAJ: *How do you translate this kind of political statement into a creative statement?*

WLS: ...when I think about the civil rights movement or any other political issue in our society I look at the psychological impact of those issues and ideas. And in my music that is what I am trying to translate; the psychological impact of it, or the psychological reality of it. Not the actual event itself, but the psychological impact that event has in society.

I am able to tap into that simply by making some kind of emotional contact with the issues. For example, 9/11. I'm Muslim. When I started working on 9/11, look man I felt powerfully connected with the fact that my emotions were also stirred very badly by those times. It was so effecting. I translated that into my music. For example, those dominant 7ths heard throughout the 9/11 [piece] those are the most mournful sounds you can hear. They are the foundation of what blues and spiritual music is about. Spiritual and gospel music coming from the African-American tradition. So I try to connect with the psychological part which houses the emotional, the intellectual, and the dream state.

AAJ: *It seems like a very difficult endeavor to undertake. You are talking about something very concrete, a historical event, or something that could be considered very intellectual, but then translating that into an effective artistic piece is a huge achievement. Some of the pieces are dedicated to individuals, like Rosa Parks. How do you go about doing a musical dedication or portrait of an individual that is different from what you just talked about for an event?*

WLS: It's the psychological part. The basic reality of the human being is that if you can tap into the psychological reality of the decisions they made... When I write these pieces, I walk through those peoples' lives daily while I am writing it. ... For example, Fanny Lou Hammer... How could a woman like that realize in an instant that human rights was an important issue? That she should dedicate her life to [it] and that voting is part of her civil liberties that she should partake in? ...That makes my heart open with a river of joy. Because that says that woman understood something about the human experience that most people never, ever get to in a full life. ...

AAJ: *How do you define civil rights?*

WLS: I define civil rights as a very important contract which the Constitution and the Bill of Rights laid out, and inherited [in part] from Britain, the basic rights that needed to be renewed and guaranteed through the civil rights movement. They are already in our documents, but it had to be renewed by the blood, sweat, and tears of all those martyrs and all those people who were victims of violence, both politically and psychologically, and economically, to reunite the Constitution to the practical values of what it means to be a citizen.

AAJ: *So is it a uniquely American phenomena? Is it confined to the contract between our legal structure and its practice in society? Or is civil rights something that goes beyond the specificity of America? ...is a distinction between civil rights and human rights?*

WLS: ...movements in this country for civil rights began in the late 1890s. By African-Americans. That movement...has shaped and evolved around the planet those who want to claim and did claim their rights as citizens. Like, for example, Ghana became the first independent nation in Africa after many years of being colonized. It could not have done that without the complete inspiration coming from civil rights in America.

AAJ: *Which also had a lot of its inspiration from the civil rights and human rights movement of Gandhi.*

WLS: ... Gandhi's existence, that idea of nonviolence that Martin Luther King preached was influenced by Gandhi, and Tolstoy. Gandhi was influenced by Tolstoy. It's international. The truth is: human beings are not defined by borders or governance.

AAJ: *It's recognized that jazz, blues, and folk/protest music played an important roll in the American civil rights movement. In your experience and studies have you found the same to be true in other freedom movements?*

WLS: Yes. Look at Bob Marley. Look at Fela [Kuti] from Nigeria. There is [the] famous singer in Chile, he was killed while performing for an audience. Many, many, many, artists have been involved with all these popular movements for justice and human rights around the world. And all of them use music and dance as a forum not just to gather people, but as a forum to create this undeniable quest to achieve the ultimate goal for freedom and liberty....

AAJ: *Is that the reason spirituality and particularly certain types of spiritual expression are such a strong part of your music, is it that they are housed in the same place?*

WLS: Yes, that is one of the reasons. Another reason is this. Coming up, listening to the bible being read...one of the most fascinating stories to me was the David who wrote Psalms. ... He was an artist. He made music. He was also a prophet. He was a spiritual leader. He was also a governor. ... Artists can do all of these things. That model of David, and that model of Bob Marley, which is one and the same—or that model of [a] Sufi master who also plays music, they are one and the same. And all of that influenced me. Made me think, can instrumental music do that? Yes, it can. It can be a political expression. It can be a spiritual expression, or any activity that we place on it in a serious context, it can express that.”