

What Smith has said about his music in the press:

On the ritual nature of music & Spiritual inspiration:

"They have a tradition there in the Delta where art is very important...artists were celebrated," he recalls... "They recognized they were a great value and asset to the community... Culture...flourished. ...when people would move out of a house, they would get musicians, they got me and other people, they would come and get musicians, horn players or guitar players or flute players, whatever, and say come and walk through my house and blow out the ghosts.

And that's what you would do. I did a number of them. You would just go through each room; blowing your trumpet, go to the next, blow your trumpet; then you walk straight out the backdoor.

It was a ritual; they were changing the atmosphere in that house and they were using one of the most powerful forms of art, which is music. ... It's in the air but even more than that it's somewhere else and that somewhere else has to be tapped into and that's what makes it powerful.

In other forms of art, you got that representation, like a painter may paint a tree... But music doesn't have that kind of a form. It comes from out there or somewhere else, some otherness. The only way that you can get it is by tapping into what comes through inspiration..."

- Wadada Leo Smith, interviewed by Kevin Le Gendre, "Spirits Rejoice", *Jazzwise*, December 2008 / January 2009, Issue 126

On American music:

"...Since 2007, I see America changing, becoming not a divided multi-cultural society, but a pluralistic cultural society where everybody has a chance. ...music had been democratic since New Orleans, with its collective improvisation., where the collective had value and every individual had equal value. This is a unique moment in this country's history, so now I call the music I make American music."

... Smith's vision is not that of a simple "all men are brothers" unity; rather, Coltrane's complex vision of unity, manifest most directly from Ascension onward, is a better model, not to mention the pioneering work of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM)...

- Marc Medwin, "Artist Feature: Wadada Leo Smith", *All About Jazz*, May 2009, No. 85

On the AACM and free music

"The AACM never called its music jazz. It never its music avant-garde; it never called it's music free improvisation. ...

"But we did call it free music... not free jazz, not free avant-garde, not free improvisation; free music as in freedom in the sense of political freedom, also most specifically in the context of the times. ...

- Kevin Le Gendre, "Spirits Rejoice", *Jazzwise*, December 2008 / January 2009, Issue 126

On the Golden Quartet:

I decided at the very beginning that Golden Quartet would be a lifelong quartet of mine, no matter what the personnel was or which direction it might go, whether it goes to the Golden Quintet...it will still be in that genre. The idea is that of one horn player and rhythm. No saxophones, no trombones, no violins; just the trumpet and rhythm. If I expanded it again to the Golden Sextet, it may have two pianos or two basses, but that's the whole idea, trying to capture that classic sound of the early days."

- Josef Woodard, "ONWARD & UPWARD: the astounding creative trajectory of avant-garde veteran WADADA LEO SMITH", *JazzTimes*, Dec. 2008, Vol. 38/No. 10

On ensembles:

"... Smith...sees a conceptual common thread in his projects. As Smith says, "...all the music I write is still creative music, written for those ensembles. The experiment is to see what kind of interplay, what kind of music intellect that these ensembles can grab onto, using these same kind of musical properties... So the experiment is with ensembles, as opposed to musical style and language. I use the same language. All of the music I ever write can be played by any one of my ensembles, and often they do play them."

- Josef Woodard, "ONWARD & UPWARD: the astounding creative trajectory of avant-garde veteran WADADA LEO SMITH", *JazzTimes*, Dec. 2008, Vol. 38/No. 10

"Every ensemble is like a planet in the cosmos and every leader of an ensemble has a master plan about creation. By creation, I mean every aspect of how that group performs, travels and interacts."

- Marc Medwin, "Artist Feature: Wadada Leo Smith", *All About Jazz*, May 2009, No. 85

On soloing:

"When you pick up your instrument, there should not be a preconceived set of information inside of you. Even though you may have knowledge before you play, you proceed as if there is no future and no past--there is only now."

- Marc Medwin, "Artist Feature: Wadada Leo Smith", *All About Jazz*, May 2009, No. 85

what the press has said about:

WADADA LEO SMITH'S GOLDEN QUARTET

TABLIGH CUNEIFORM (RUNE 270) 2008

Lineup: **Wadada Leo Smith** (trumpet), **Vijay Iyer** (piano, Fender Rhodes and synthesizer), **John Lindberg** (bass), **Shannon Jackson** (drums)

"Smith has always created vivid atmospheres in his music. The long slow clarion call; the piercing high note sustained with great clarity before being pushed down to a low, elegiac swoon; the strafing volley of short tones that set a piece in motion without losing the grace of the meditative introduction: these are...just a few of the devices that feed into a sense of his music as both ceremony and invocation of spirits. They are presented as compellingly as ever in this quite majestic concert... Smith has brought a degree of his interest in Miles Davis *Bitches Brew* period...into an acoustic context here, with spooky resonances and the use of wah wah pedal by bassist Lindberg...on the opener 'Rosa Parks'... But...that isn't as important as the great sensitivity and listening as well as playing skills displayed by this latest edition of Smith's Golden Quartet. **On the lengthy title track, the narrative thread of the music is wound over a series of stark, almost haiku-like passages... The music shifts far beyond linear structures to evoke a dreamy, hazy spindrift, one in which pert motifs ...illuminate the movement like a lighthouse in the dark. Tone poetry is something to which many musicians aspire but Smith, with his richness of timbre and ritualistic implications in his performances, really has understood how to do just that. [4 stars]**"

- Kevin Le Gendre, *Jazzwise*, November 2008, Issue 125

"... To say the new lineup is powerful would be a huge understatement. Smith elicits a symphony of sounds from his trumpet. Pianist Vijay Iyer seems more caffeinated than usual... Bassist John Lindberg...threatens to pop the woofers. Shannon Jackson--perhaps jazz's most bombastic percussionist...beats his kit so feverishly..."

Tabligh comprises four songs, and the group really stretches out. Smith begins with a clarion call that announces "Rosa Parks," and eventually a fusion groove emerges... Smith blows bracing blasts over the gurgling electric piano and churning rhythm... Sometimes he blows 16 notes in a single bar, and sometimes he drops only a note per measure. **When he turns it on, his runs are majestic.**

So are Iyer's. He's got the focus for much of "DeJohnette"... with complicated, free-improv solo on the grand piano. ...

... "Caravan of Winter"...begins as a dark and moody ballad and graduates to a breakneck battle...the concert's climax: the 24-minute epic title track... begins innocently...with a reserved trumpet solo over a space-age synthesizer, but then Smith's horn begins moaning and barking. ...the drama intensifies and gets to the point: four-way simultaneous soloing, violent and free."

- Steve Greenlee, *JazzTimes*, December 2008, vol.38, no.10

"**There are two things to be thankful for with *Tabligh*... [4 stars]: Wadada Leo Smith's decision to continue working in the Golden Quartet format after the death of bassist Malachi Favors and the return of drummer Shannon Jackson.** Recorded live in 2005, with John Lindberg replacing Favors and Vijay Iyer taking the seat vacated by Anthony Davis, *Tabligh* is defined by Jackson's muscular energy. ... **The centerpiece...is the less-structured, 25-minute workout on the title composition, where the band unleashes waves of expression that culminate with an explosion from Jackson's kit.**"

- James Hale, *Downbeat*, September 2008, Vol. 75. No. 9

"... Pursuing a unique kind of pan-spirituality and a syncretic musical theory (Ankhrasmation), Smith has over time assembled a number of different units to explore specific aspects of his musical vision... One of the longest is the Golden Quartet..."

On their first Cuneiform release, the group delivers a fierce live set at the 2005 CalArts festival. ...the music often sounds as if it's been warmed by Miles' lonely fire, it's distinctive and idiomatic despite the obvious influence. The reflective lyricism is phrased in tone-mangling keyboards, brass lightning bolts, and polymorphous rhythms that fuse harmolodic boogie with rubbery swing.

"Rosa Parks" seems to begin in the high atmosphere, nanoparticles and dust swirling provocatively, with Smith's lone trumpet cry seemingly the only definable presence in this musical cosmos. But then dirty Rhodes and some loose booty funk emerge to transform the piece into something wonderfully polyphonic, filled with collective soloing and with some truly memorable and expressive playing from Jackson. ...it's a sheer joy to listen to his skittery shuffle on "DeJohnette," which winningly abstracts the bustle of its dedicatee and opens up this slice of referential jazz and divides it among the quartet. Iyer switches to acoustic here... The relatively brief "Caravan of Winter" is in many ways a feature for the graceful, lyrical playing of Lindberg... **It's a fantastic album, a reminder of the power of Smith's personality and of good small-group jazz.**

- Jason Bivins, *Dusted Magazine*, Sep. 12, 2008, www.dustedmagazine.com

"...Smith has a new trio behind him... The music they make together is reminiscent of the earlier recordings in that it is **lyrical and atmospheric, featuring both wide-open spaces and a heaping dose of pleasing melody.**

...the start of this disc is going to remind many listeners of the early electric experiments of Miles Davis. "Rosa Parks" combines plaintive trumpet cries with a grooving pulse colored mainly by electric piano—and it comes up like a gorgeous dawn just like "In a Silent Way". ... In other respects, though, **this music is more open and harmonically aggressive than Miles's work, with Iyer playing craggy, dissonant solos and offering the kind of accompaniment that suggests a secret meeting between Davis and Cecil Taylor circa 1973.** Jackson playing rolling, explosive drums...colors this exciting release with subtle care. [Rating: 8/10]"

- Will Layman, *PopMatters*, August 25, 2008, www.popmatters.com

"... The AACM-schooled trumpeter whose Kabell recordings were micro yet far more expansive than any Art Ensemble recordings was, at heart, a traditionalist. Of course, Smith's name is rarely—if ever—mentioned alongside the new traditionalists coming up in the '80s... Smith's participation in **groups like Yo Miles! and his own Golden Quartet place him in line with those who are directly addressing and expanding upon the post-bop language vis-a-vis Miles Davis.** ...

... Smith's philosophy of rhythm units seems atomistic, but being able to encapsulate and reference an entire composition (or an entire tradition) in phrases and the spaces between gives largeness to the very small. Miles' sound might be more condensed, even as the music was often very open. It's an interesting dichotomy that he was able to play with...

On "Rosa Parks," the image conjured—courtesy Iyer's electric piano and synthesizers—is that of Miles' languid late-Sixties pulse, yet with Smith skittering over the top in brittle explosions often in tandem with Jackson's martial Sunny Murray-esque allover thrum. ...never is he indirect, even at his most terse. ... Smith's homage to the group's previous percussionist, "DeJohnette," begins with a terse brass sketch... **Smith, like Miles, knows how to use a group and is able to adjust his prominence or sit back and watch others create in a framework he may direct, but whose impulses are collective.** This collectivity is often dense, constant cymbal chatter, arco glisses and clanging blocks filling in while Smith's pointed shots and simple extrapolations sometimes sail of a separate, sketched motor.

Midway through "DeJohnette" a wistful blues etude erupts into growls and blurred high-register swaths, Smith encapsulating a full-band density in nearly unaccompanied space. **It is these moments where the rhythm section mostly lays out, prodding on occasion, that the trumpeter steps out into the open and his range—sonic and historical—cuts through the air. Tabligh is an album that should be on the shelf of anyone with an interest in the past eighty-odd years of trumpet improvisation."**

- Clifford Allen, *Bagatellen*, July 21, 2008, www.bagatellen.com

"Trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith's Golden Quartet is an evolving ensemble. ... As with the earlier tandems, **Tabligh's every member is a loquacious improviser. Smith makes his trumpet a clarion call for change. His notes are pure** even as he engages them in strong emotions. **His power is palpable but not overwhelming. All of this makes the music potent. The other members, strong in their technique, and forward in their creative impulses, elevate the compositions.**

Smith's writing lays the groundwork, but there is plenty of room to dive into a tangent and surprise. The changes of meter and time, the juxtaposition of calm and turbulence all lend themselves to making the music a driving force.

"**Tabligh,**" captures all these characteristics. Smith mutes the trumpet, his playing falls like a gentle shadow at dusk. ... The mood is quiet, ideas are formed at a deliberate pace, the air is chamber-like. And then comes the spark from Jackson and the portrait becomes vibrant and pulsates as the band slaps deeper colors into the mix. The atmosphere churns and throbs as the quartet finds a new groove. ...

"Caravan of Winter" has a dark beauty. Smith works over the theme, hewing close to the melody. ... **The music is remarkably crafted and cements the credentials of the quartet as a divining force."**

- Jerry D'Souza, *All About Jazz*, August 18, 2008, www.allaboutjazz.com

"The Golden Quartet is the closest thing to a standard jazz group that Wadada Leo Smith ever used to present his own music. Sometimes traditional elements such as jazz-funk and marches emerge on the first two albums...both of which featured the original band with Anthony Davis, Malachi Favors, and Jack DeJohnette. **But the music rarely sounds conventional, thanks to Smith's elliptical lyricism and his unique method of blending improvisation and composition. Now, with Vijay Iyer, John Lindberg, and Ronald Shannon Jackson aboard, the energy level is noticeably higher and with the new quartet's greater reliance on real-time electronic processing of sounds, the music displays a wider timbral palette.** On this live recording from 2005, the band is as comfortable and attuned to Smith's compositions as any band he's ever led; **the music is lively, even explosive at times, yet still exquisitely balanced.**

No other composer accommodates the independence of the individual and the unity of the ensemble in quite the way Smith does. ... There are always several things occurring simultaneously, with connections between events being often just barely implied. Yet the collective sound always coheres into something purposeful and beautiful. This is surely by design and not co-incidence...

To achieve this clarity and poise, Smith pares everything down to fundamental building blocks. Sound and silence, vertical and horizontal movement, an enormous catalog of timbres and textures, attack and decay, fast and slow tempos, staccato and legato notes and phrases, these are a few of the nucleic acids out of which he assembles the DNA of any performance. On "Rose Parks," he contrasts staccato and legato passages, manipulates timbre, and varies the speed and density of his lines with great deliberation. ... On "Caravan of Winter," he works with attack and decay, making his notes appear to advance and recede... **There is so much happening inside one tone, that it feels as if he can make just one note swing all by itself. To a large degree, Smith's solos are microcosms of what's happening in the larger scale of the composition. ...**

The player-interpreters have as big an impact on the performance as the composer-leader. Lindberg's use of electronics adds a rubbery rhythmic layer to "Rosa Parks" that runs through whatever is unfolding around it, like a river in a landscape. ... The long title track is the best showcase of Iyer's grasp of Smith's music. ...his every contribution is apt, from the mystery and beauty of his synthesizer and Fender Rhodes at the opening, to his chiming chords in a duet with Lindberg, and his delicate duet with Smith near the end. Jackson is an unprecedented presence in Smith's music, exerting a constant forward pressure...

Remarkably, the personalities and forces are kept in balance. The music is like a mobile: there's a sense of great independent movement taking place within a strong framework, of an artwork that can change from moment to moment and still retain its integrity as a formal entity."

- Ed Hazell, *Point of Departure*, #18, www.pointofdeparture.org

"... Here **Smith and company balance groove and freedom** utilizing the colorations of Smith's distinctive trumpet, Iyer's acoustic piano, Fender Rhodes, and synth, Lindberg's elastic bass playing, and Shannon Jackson's crashing momentum. As always, **Smith pushes the music toward structural abstraction. The leader is in top form throughout, his crying lines cutting through with clarion passion, parsing his phrases with tensile concision; every note placed for maximum dramatic weight.** Iyer serves as more of a colorist... Lindberg's playing harkens back to his early work with groups like the Human Arts Ensemble. And the setting brings out some of Jackson's best playing in years. **This one is another winner for Smith and shows how he is continuing to push this fruitful setting in new ways."**

- Michael Rosenstein, *Cadence*, Jan/Feb/Mar 2009

"... Smith shifts modes to a more atmospheric and discreetly groove-driven sound on...Tabligh. ... **Gorgeously emotive, edgy and spacious jazz with a high melodic risk factor. ..."**

- Walter Tunis, *The Musical Box*, June 18, 2008, musicalbox.wordpress.com

"... The expansive set reveals the quartet's versatility, ranging from atmospheric ballads and searing electronic melt-downs to spacious aleatoric detours and fragmentary collective improvisations.

... For all the obvious nods to the past, the Golden Quartet approaches these epic pieces from a meditative angle—more akin to the restful spirituality of John Coltrane than the moody introspection of the Dark Prince.

"Rosa Parks" bookends a furious, Bitches Brew-inspired electronic maelstrom with wistful cries from the leader's trumpet. ... "DeJohnette" inverts a haunting blues with an acoustic fusillade of free jazz expressionism... The mysterious drama of "Caravan of Winter" introduces the ambitious title track which progresses from ambient pointillism to frenzied chaos.

A powerful document, *Tabligh* is a welcome reminder of Smith's continued importance in the continuum of creative improvised music."

- Troy Collins, *All About Jazz*, August 21, 2008, www.allaboutjazz.com

"A stalwart of the avant garde for nearly four decades, Smith continues at the head of the pack in free jazz. In this set of four moody, barely-structured pieces, the trumpeter frequently evokes late-period Miles Davis. He sometimes takes the horn below its natural range to explore pedal-tone territory that Davis never visited. Pianist Vijay Iyer, bassist John Lindberg and drummer Shannon Jackson have developed an uncanny ability to react to Smith's flights of unrestrained imagination. ...**the four interact with astonishing energy and empathy."**

- Doug Ramsey, *RiffTides*, December 12, 2008, www.artsjournal.com/riffTides

"This 2008 release led by progressive jazz trumpeter and early member of Chicago's cutting-edge AACM consortium, Wadada Leo Smith will certainly reside near the zenith of his voluminous discography as a leader and session artist. ...

The recording itself is enamored by a crystalline sound presentation, as the band was captured during a performance for the CalArts Creative Music Festival in 2005. And with these four extended Smith compositions, the quartet surges forward with the impetus of heavyweight boxers pursuing a rigorous training regimen. ...Smith leads the charge via his bold, golden toned lines as the quartet communicates a flexible, powerful and fluid mode of attack throughout.

The respective musicians intimate **an alignment of progressive-jazz and improvising all-stars.** ...drumming hero Shannon Jackson often thrusts the band's momentum into the red zone via his explosive fills and punchy crash-and-burn like accents. ...Iyer's darkly textured synth swashes add an ethereal element to quieter moments...

On the piece titled "Caravan of Winter,"...Iyer, Jackson and bassist John Lindberg generate a sense of the apocalypse. ... **Simply stated, it's a tour-de-force program, complete with a distinct sense of adventure. (Feverishly recommended...)"**

- Glenn Astarita, *Jazzreview.com*

"Trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith has always carved out his own territory in the music and *Tabligh* is one of the best realizations of his work on record.

...his unaccompanied intro to the opening "Rosa Parks" is the work of a more reflective musician. ...That intro acts also as the most poised point of entry into a highly considered sound world where conventional instrumental roles are happily and tellingly subverted.

Shannon Jackson on drums plays no small part in bringing that world to life. On "DeJohnette" he's a veritable mine of rhythmic possibilities—especially against Vijay Iyer's understated piano—whilst bass player John Lindberg shows why he's made it onto record as many times as he has. ... **The music is a riot of color while, at the same time, it's profoundly measured, as if the group is collectively engaged in that tricky pursuit of contributing while simultaneously listening deeply.**

... the music is pervaded by a very different kind of rhythmic ambiguity to that which Davis was exploring with *On The Corner* (Columbia, 1972), and the results are compelling enough to suggest that **individuals like Smith exemplify the wisdom of age."**

- Nic Jones, *All About Jazz*, August 25, 2008, www.allaboutjazz.com

"...the album's raucously electric passages are the work of a tight ensemble whose members are discovering they have much to say to each other. ... Smith remains the guiding hand, however, by jumping in periodically to control the fray.

... one indicator of the Golden Quartet's charmed versatility is how sinuously the ensemble downshifts from freebop kineticism to both stormy and lyrical quiescence on tracks like "DeJohnette" and the marathon title cut. Jackson's thundering drumming is a reminder that the harmolodic funk of the '80s is the missing link between electric Miles and today's new-millennial fusions, and Iyer consistently serves up superlative runs whether on piano or keyboards. **Critic's Rating: [5 Stars]"**

- K. Leander Williams, *Time Out New York*, Issue 663 : Jun 11-17, 2008, newyork.timeout.com

"... The sound is, in part, an exploration of Miles' electric period, from 1969-75, albeit in a sparer mode... The music is dark, turbulent, murky, intense—often with an In a Silent Way sparkle, via Vijay Iyer's Fender Rhodes work.

Iyer is an interesting choice to take the place of Anthony Davis... His teaming with Smith takes his playing to more spacious territory and removes some of the urgency from his sound, leaving the urgency to Smith's trumpet playing and Shannon Jackson's drums. Iyer, when he's on the Fender Rhodes...supplies bursts of metallic colors and sparkling washes of electricity, making noises like the Northern Lights might sound.

Shannon Jackson (who takes an approach closer to the former Miles Davis drummer, Tony Williams, of the Second Great Davis Quintet of the mid-late sixties) replaces Jack DeJohnette... simmers, then explodes and keeps things on a keen edge when Smith isn't holding down that job.

The tunes are extended avant-garde workouts...that roll from fiery abstractions to inward, edgy ruminations without losing their focus or accessibility. This is a fine step forward for Wadada Leo Smith's second great Golden Quartet."

- Dan McClenaghan, *All About Jazz*, July 05, 2008, www.allaboutjazz.com

"Trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith has always been one of my favorite musicians, and that is confirmed again by the new release of his Golden Quartet, which consists of an entirely new line-up. ...It's the same high quality, but the approach is different. ... On "Rosa Parks", the first track, the four musicians venture back into electric Miles territory... The second track is called "DeJohnette", aptly starting with fierce drumming by Ronald Shannon Jackson, joined by Vijay Iyer who surely is one of the most lyrical and rhythmically adroit pianists of the moment, he moves the track into free jazz regions, very abstract and dissonant, joined by John Lindberg on arco, then there's a moment's pause and Wadada's rhythmic trumpet invites the other musicians... electrifying and beautiful. The third track "Caravan Of Winter", is slow and mysterious. ... **The spiritual connotation of the piece is evident, with Wadada Leo Smith playing slow, precise and piercing trumpet tones over a sparse acoustic piano background to start with, then the piece explores a variety of moods... And if the first track was reminiscent of Miles, the music evolves into the more spiritual areas of the late phase Coltrane, creating vast expanses of sound, but with a relatively open texture, unhindered by fixed concepts, free, yet clearly structured. The soft lyrical approach of Lindberg and Iyer is in stark contrast to Ronald Shannon Jackson's hammering and pounding, which is absolutely essential here to bring the rawness needed in this journey... And Wadada Leo Smith spans everything. He is lyrical, intense, soaring, powerful, meditative, hard, soft, deep ... and offering lots of space to the other players. The amazing feat is that the quartet - and this really is a quartet album, rather than an accompanied soloist - integrates much of the lightness and almost zen-like fragility of Wadada's solo or duo releases. An amazing and paradoxical album, full of musical inventiveness, human feelings and spiritual moments. For sure one of the highlights of this year."**

- Stef Gijssels, *Free Jazz*, May 18, 2008, freejazz-stef.blogspot.com & *Eartrip*, Issue 2, September 2008

"... Smith lingers at the meeting point between free and modal on this track. "Rosa Parks" begins and ends with extended solo trumpet sections, understated and haunting. But in between, the listener is tossed into a cauldron of grooving sound. **The trumpeter...feeds off the energy of a world-class rhythm section. ...this lineup of Iyer, Jackson and Lindberg keeps things edgy and full of surprises.** Old jazz revolutionaries never die . . . they just take another chorus! [Rating: 88/100 – About track rating scores: 85-90 = *Very good. Substantive work deserving a listeners' attention.*]"

- Ted Gioia, *Jazz.com*

"... Since his emergence in the 1960s Smith's music has taken several routes of expression—minimalist low-volume chamber jazz, "out" forays with Anthony Braxton, Leroy Jenkins, and Larry Ochs' What We Live, and tributes to the electric music of Miles Davis in the company of guitar wizard Henry Kaiser. To a degree, all those seemingly disparate aspects come together on the latest from Smith's Golden Quartet, *Tabligh*.

Of Smith's many ventures, his Golden Quartet...is nominally the most "straight-ahead." ... Smith chases the ghost of Davis and frequently catches it—his trumpet is crisp, mordantly biting, and riveting as that of Davis' best in the mid-'60s and early '70s... Iyer is fluidly lyrical and restrained *a la* Paul Bley, using minimum notes for maximum effect. **Much of this set has an elemental, long-ago blues-rooted "cry" to it that's very...poignant. ...chalk up another winner for Smith, and I'd highly recommend *Tabligh* for open-minded jazz and adventurous rock fans wanting to expose themselves to "freer" music. "**

- Mark Keresman, *Jazzreview.com*

"...some great "out" records got overlooked in the shuffle to compile these best-of-'08s, and so I've got a handful here of five avant-garde albums...in 2008 that deserve your attention.

... **Smith makes music as mysterious as it is cerebral and culture-spanning.** *Tabligh* uses sinuous elements of European, Asian, and especially Middle Eastern music to forge musical links between Muslim religious rites ("Tabligh"), American musical traditions ("DeJohnette") and even the civil rights movement ("Rosa Parks"). **A quartet of legends young and old...make breathtaking contributions to the effort."**

- Michael J. West, "Jazz 2008: The Outliers" *Washington City Paper's Black Plastic Bag Blogs*, December 31, 2008

FEATURES & ARTICLES:

excerpts from features/articles about Wadada Leo Smith:

“... Smith has spent his life honing the craft born of his initial artistic visions. ... He developed a unique language that confronts issues of rhythm, the sound/silence dichotomy, velocity and improvisation using pictographic notation which, in combination with standard notation, allows the composer to dictate certain activities while retaining the artist's individual voice. ...

It was then Smith's goal to hone his language to be as specific but as inclusive as possible...

... the ideas inherent in Smith's approach to these pieces of music inform the way he interacts with every group with which he performs. ... Smith...hears every note while maintaining a distance in which his focus is on intuition and creativity.

It is this philosophy of active stasis that informs every note played by the Golden Quartet... A quintet version performed several pieces, involving various uses of Ankhramation, at last summer's Vision Festival; the group alternated long sweeping passages of sparse pointillism and supreme reflectivity with blistering forays into electric jazz, which Smith is eager to separate from what is commonly called jazz-rock fusion. ... Certainly, distortion and electricity are present in the group's sound, but the broad sweeping gestures, punctuated by sharp shocks and dialogic rebounds, put the music in a different space. Vijay Iyer, Pheeroan akLaff and John Lindberg are all veteran improvisers and their diverse and pan-idiomatic contributions reflect Smith's emphasis on the individual/collective dialectic. ...the Vision performance will be released on Cuneiform...as part of a double CD called *Spiritual Dimensions*, along with music from Smith's electric ensemble Organics.

The Cuneiform set will be one of several important Smith projects to emerge this year. ...

These projects are simply continuations of an astonishing series of timbral explorations that began with “The Bells” over 40 years ago...-

- Marc Medwin, “Artist Feature: Wadada Leo Smith”, *All About Jazz*, May 2009, No. 85

“... THIS YEAR, SMITH'S SOUND and artistic fervor are in the air, in terms of ongoing projects and performances and in the archival form of a gripping new live album, *Tabligh* (Cuneiform), which documents a special incarnation of his Golden quartet, recorded in 2006 at the REDCAT Theater in Los Angeles. ...

Smith's concert was one of the L.A. area's finest jazz events that year, due in no small part to the high level of intrigue and dialogue between Smith, volcanic drummer Ronald Shannon Jackson, pianist Vijay Iyer and bassist John Lindberg. Electro-acoustic timbres and shifting relationships of structure and improvisation conspired toward a refreshing new entity...with echoes of '70s Miles electric-jazz voodoo, AACM ideals and something new and personal. ...

...“My *Tabligh* deals with the issue of the way people look at Islamic ideas and people in Islam.” ... The back stories feed his musical thinking, as on “Rosa Parks,” in which “the horizontal form keeps repeating and changing and being eclipsed—has to do with the kind of notion that Rosa Parks set out thinking about, the progressive movement towards an open society.”

Projecting a conceptual basis in his music is central to Smith's aesthetic, which is never about penning old school head-solo-head type tunes. ...

In the mix of Smith's current projects, Golden Quartet holds a special fascination. ...

... “The Shannon Jackson dates with Golden Quartet gave it this other kind of feeling... rambunctious and rough, which I like in drumming. And he has a good sense of dramatics in playing... he was just the opposite of Jack DeJohnette, which I wanted.” ...

I decided at the very beginning that Golden Quartet would be a lifelong quartet of mine, no matter what the personnel was or which direction it might go, whether it goes to the Golden Quintet.....”

As of summer 2008, Smith reports, “I feel more driven now than ever. ...Also, performance-wise, I've gotten a chance to play more of my music since the turn of the century than ever before. Two of the main reasons were the Golden Quartet and Yo Miles! music. Both of those ensembles show something distinctly about what I was doing. They also gave people a chance to see there was other stuff in the bag. ...”

- Josef Woodard, “ONWARD & UPWARD: the astounding creative trajectory of avant-garde veteran WADADA LEO SMITH”, *JazzTimes*, Dec. 2008, Vol. 38/No., 10

“... Smith's new album *Tabligh* is possibly the most direct reflection of his beliefs, the title being an Arabic word that “means to disseminate those ideas about spirituality that relate to the koran.” ...the album features the latest version of the trumpeter's Golden Quartet...playing music full of ebb and flow tempos, shimmering timbres and the subtle but forceful blues undertow that marked previous CDs like 2004's *The Year Of The Elephant* and 2001's Golden Quartet. ... As engrossing as the music on *Tabligh* is, the political framework around it is too important to overlook. ...Connecting music to current events and acknowledging the prevailing state of society is nothing new to Smith. ...a desire to consecrate activists...binds albums like 1984's *Procession Of The Great Ancestry*, 1993's *Kulture Jazz* and 2008's *Tabligh*. ...

To a certain extent it could be argued that the trumpeter has, from his very deep roots in African-American music, crafted new Negro spirituals that input a wide variety of elements drawn from the philosophies and outlooks of other cultures as well as their sounds. He has sought to broaden the context in which jazz, and its exponents are perceived. Hence his embrace not just of Islam and rastafari but of reggae music gives credence to the idea of a form of unified art in the Black diaspora, where African-American, African and Caribbean creative impulses may coalesce.

Ultimately Wadada Leo Smith is a blues musician. The reason why his body of work is important is that he follows in the footsteps of many of the music's original pioneers who did not bolt themselves down to a rigid 12 bar structures but approached phrase length and meter in looser, more mutative ways. ...

Through his absorption of many musical cultures outside of what he was born into, Smith has made the blues a more supple form. ...breathing space and dramatic pause [are] frequently deployed to great effect.

...The whole emotional and spiritual motivation for a song has to be in sync with the performance. ...“In music it's an aesthetic where the notion of sincerity takes place,” he observes, his gaze intense. “For example, it would be inappropriate to play a note or a phrase or a rhythm that you didn't feel. ...

... Many of his compositions are either directly or indirectly inspired by individuals that he feels have made a worthwhile contribution to democracy, social justice or the enrichment of daily life through art.

Nothing symbolises this stance more than the two opening tracks of Smith's current set *Tabligh*. The second is named after the drummer Jack DeJohnette, one of the great monuments of contemporary jazz... The first piece is entitled ‘Rosa Parks’, the historic civil rights icon, whose refusal to accept second citizenship was a catalyst to Martin Luther King's campaigns in the early-60s....

- Kevin Le Gendre, “*Spirits Rejoice*”, *Jazzwise*, December 2008 / January 2009, Issue 126

“To describe Ishmael Wadada Leo Smith as a musician with a holistic vision is an understatement. ...Smith has actively pursued a theory and practice of music that embraces nearly every conceivable element of human life.

With Smith, a conversation that begins with a music-specific query moves seamlessly on to topics of ecology, language and spirituality...and always concludes poignantly. Overall, Smith conceives of most issues in the largest possible frame. For instance, when asked about his decision to relocate to New Haven in the 1970s, he cites Thoreau and Emerson, and the compositions of Charles Ives, as important factors.

New Haven's jazz scene was vibrant in the 1970s, and Smith was a linchpin. Along with saxophonist Marion Brown, Smith launched the Creative Music Improvisers Forum and established a space for non-commercial music in non-commercial settings...

Though his main ax is the trumpet, Smith is a multi-instrumentalist. Likewise, though his music is usually categorized as avant-garde or “free jazz,” his compositions and improvisations draw on nearly every form of American music and West African, Japanese, Indonesian and Western classical sounds and techniques. ...

Despite the degree of intellectual energy within his music and the highly unconventional sounds he creates, Smith considers his work as accessible as popular music.

“I don't believe that people need special training to hear my music...” says Smith in a recent phone interview. “The strongest way in which one can receive any information is in the most sincere way, and you can only do that if you come to it with an un-opinionated attitude. All one needs to be able to do is hear, see, and balance their intelligence with their heart and they will have no problem.” ...

At Firehouse 12 Smith will lead “Organic Resonance,” his newest ensemble. The group, which performs Smith's original compositions, features two guitars, electric and acoustic basses, and the ferociously nimble Pheeroan AkLaff, Smith's long-time collaborator and an ex-New Haven resident, on drums. Smith is eagerly anticipating the event.

“I expect to transform the audience,” he says. “I expect to be transformed along with them.””

- Bill Carbone, “Wadada Leo Smith brings his holistic vision back to New Haven”, *New Haven Advocate*, April 16, 2009, www.newhavenadvocate.com