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Introduction

Throughout the early 1980s, Sweet Basil, a popular jazz club in New York City, was regularly packed and infused with energy as the Pharoah Sanders Quartet was slamming it—Sanders on tenor, John Hicks on piano, Walter Booker on bass, and Idris Muhammad on drums.[1] The music was up-tempo and unflagging in its intensity and drive. The rhythm section was playing with a straight-ahead yet contemporary feel, while Sanders was seamlessly blending the avant-garde or free aesthetic and mainstream straight-ahead jazz, as well as the blues and R&B influences from early in his career.[2] This band—and this period of Sanders's career—have been largely neglected and Sanders himself has generally been poorly represented in the media.[3]

Sanders, as is true for many, many musicians, suffers from the fact that in critical discourses jazz styles often remain conceptualized as fitting into pre-conceived categories such as straight-ahead, mainstream, and avant-garde or free jazz. Fortunately,

[1]We have all had our important experiences with live music—performances that, for one reason or another, are memorable or meaningful. The Sweet Basil performances that I attended (mentioned above) have stuck with me, and were quite influential for me as a performer, composer, and bandleader. It is largely in the context of my experience in those musical roles that I examine Sanders's work here.

[2]A brief digression is immediately necessary as in the first paragraph of this article, I use the terms mainstream, straight-ahead, and avant-garde. They are all loaded and unspecific terms, few people are happy with them, and there is a wide discrepancy in opinions regarding their definitions. In the same way that musicians frequently dislike the term jazz, these terms are considered to be limiting and unnecessary. However, when talking about music, it is hard to do so without terms and general frames of reference. It is beyond the scope of this article to define theses terms at length, and I am presuming a readership of knowledgeable jazz listeners and scholars. However, as a basic frame of reference (my frame of reference, that is), straight-ahead refers to styles that generally have a swing rhythmic feel and that largely employ tonally based chord progressions. This includes jazz from its inception through styles such as swing, bebop, hard bop, cool jazz, and soul jazz. The term mainstream, though it is also vague and contentious, refers to straight-ahead musicians and styles since the 1960s whose playing forms the core of jazz for most listeners, but generally excludes the avant-garde. A contemporary feel of straight-ahead implies using an up-to-date language and style. In this case I refer to Hicks's use of fourths voicings on the piano, for example, a walking bass line, and a swing drum feel that is in a contemporary style. The terms avant-garde, free jazz, and the "new thing" refer to the movement that began in the late 1950s and 1960s by such artists as Cecil Taylor and Ornette Coleman, and are continued by contemporary practitioners using the language of the style. It is a broad genre but, as opposed to straight-ahead, there is often a free approach to rhythm and meter while also maintaining a jazz feel, there is less reliance upon chord progressions—they are often not present, alternative approaches to form are used, and the use of extended or unorthodox instrumental techniques are common.

[3]In October 2015, Sanders received an NEA Jazz Masters Award along with tenor saxophonist Archie Shepp and vibraphonist Gary Burton. I was happy to see this somewhat rare recognition of the importance of Sanders and his music.

these terms mean less and less all the time as players are much more freely crossing such boundaries, embracing values which I suggest are central to Sanders's ability and desire to unselfconsciously blend different styles. I will discuss Sanders's relationship to these ideas throughout the article. The issues surrounding the vagueness and contentiousness of these terms are central to Sanders's reception over the years, and also speak to a larger issue in jazz historiography. For example, the term avant-garde is at times constructed as being diametrically opposed to the terms straight-ahead and mainstream. But since Sanders inhabits both of these worlds, and always has, he stands as an illustrative example of an artist that is not easily pigeonholed into a specific category. For jazz critics, this makes him difficult to discuss—and consequently easy to ignore or challenging to consider—given the often overly fixed notions of stylistic boundaries in jazz narratives. If he had just been a "free player" it would be easier to place him in a category with artists such as Albert Ayler, late John Coltrane, Cecil Taylor, Ornette Coleman, and the AACM, but the "mainstream" and "pop" leanings problematize that idea. His playing is "free," but not "free enough," yet he is also not "mainstream" enough to be placed into that category either.

Consequently, there are two main streams in this article, which on the surface may seem disconnected, but are, in fact, closely linked. In the first half, I discuss Sanders's recorded output, with particular attention paid to what I consider to be his milestone recordings between the late 1960s and the early 1980s. At the start of this period, Sanders was beginning his association with John Coltrane, an association that would launch him into public consciousness, but would also prove to be somewhat limiting with respect to his critical reception. I close this discussion with an examination of his quartet work in the early 1980s that was more squarely grounded in the jazz mainstream. Between these framing recordings, Sanders negotiates his musical identity within the context of a rapidly shifting jazz world, as well as his growth as a musician.

In the second half of the essay I assess the critical response to Sanders and his music to examine his reception, as well as to more fully contextualize his career. Specifically, I argue that, despite his quite varied output, Sanders's critical reception was hindered by the inability of many critics to move beyond his playing and recording in the 1960s, including his association with the free jazz movement, and with John Coltrane in particular, as well as Sanders's work in the late 1960s with "The Creator Has a Master Plan." As a result, Sanders's more mainstream early 1980s work was at times met with derision, and more often either forgotten or ignored. I posit here that Sanders's style steadily matured throughout his career and that his music from the early 1980s, exemplified in the 1981 recording *Live*, exhibits a genre crossing style that seems to have largely confounded critics.

In some ways this is understandable, as Pharoah Sanders's trajectory as a professional saxophonist would have been difficult to predict in the early stages of his career. His work, however, has demonstrated a fascinating transformation both in his playing and the types of musical settings he chose to surround himself with. The manner in which Sanders gradually and steadily developed while establishing a successful commercial career—typified by the Sweet Basil performances I attended, and also

captured on his record, *Live*—particularly intrigues me, and is the primary focus of this article.

Sanders first moved from playing the blues and R&B early in his career to being a free player in New York in the 1960s.[4] It is at this point where I begin to trace the path of his career through recordings and performances in a variety of settings with various musical approaches. I examine his evolution from John Coltrane's *Meditations* (1965), through *Karma* (1969) and Sanders's hit, "The Creator Has a Master Plan," *Thembi* (1971), *Love Will Find a Way* (1977), and eventually to *Live* (1981). This period of his career (the early 1980s) is frequently overlooked in the literature on Sanders, and when it is discussed it is frequently misunderstood in terms of its relationship to his career as a whole.

Sanders's development, as is the case for all artists, came about for a variety of reasons, including musical and aesthetic choices as well as cultural and social changes throughout his career. It is also, however, the result of commercial and professional decisions along the way, and we can see this demonstrated through his material and approaches with the various records I discuss below. Interestingly, the trajectory of Sanders's career is essentially opposite to that of Coltrane. Coltrane moved from straight-ahead playing, to a tonally stretched approach to straight-ahead playing that blurred the divisions between straight-ahead and avant-garde with the John Coltrane Quartet,[5] and finally on to a more avant-garde style in the last stage of his career. Sanders, by contrast, evolved from free playing, through various styles, and finally to a more straight-ahead approach, while also managing to maintain his relationship to the avant-garde.

As I discuss later, the literature on Sanders generally focuses on his relationship to Coltrane in one way or another. Indeed, most contemporary jazz saxophone players have had to come to terms with their relationship to Coltrane—his influence may be more pronounced than any other player in jazz since the 1960s on any instrument.[6] Sanders's career, however, should not be examined solely in relation to Coltrane, a tendency that critics lean towards, and an intimation that Sanders himself steadfastly

[4]Sanders's early avant-garde work of course was not just with Coltrane, but also with other important members of the avant-garde, such as Sun Ra, Don Cherry, Paul Bley, and Carla Bley. These early recordings, some recently released and re-released on *Pharoah Sanders: In the Beginning (1963–1964)* on ESP-Disk, document a solid player already able to speak in both avant-garde and more traditional idioms, giving an indication of where he would eventually land creatively. See Pharoah Sanders, *Pharoah Sanders: In the Beginning (1963–1964)*, ESP-Disk ESP-4069, 2012, CD.

[5]To these ears, Coltrane's approach with his quartet continued to be tonally based, though Coltrane was stretching tonality as far as possible with his intense investigation of harmonic cycles and through his unprecedented technique on the instrument. His playing eventually sounded as if it was outside tonal regions, but he was actually moving through them faster than we were used to hearing. The quartet's style was based on this notion, allowing as much harmonic openness as possible while also remaining anchored in a tonality or tonalities, as well as a steady pulse.

[6]After listing numerous top saxophonists that were influenced by Coltrane, Lewis Porter states that Coltrane's " … influence extends far beyond saxophonists—he affected the whole field of jazz improvisation, influenced the ensemble sound of jazz groups, and set forth an attitude about what jazz is and what it can be." See Lewis Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 295.

resists.[7] Coltrane's influence was important in Sanders's development, but is just one of many for this unique player.

As I examine Sanders's musical and career trajectory, several things stand out as stylistic developments and commercial choices: the ability to blend straight-ahead and free styles; the use of vamps, often in the bass; the use of two-chord (or two tonality) progressions; and a willingness and openness to use these stylistic mannerisms in a variety of musical contexts. Also, while a soft spoken and humble man, he has proven to be a strong and decisive bandleader who has continually made clear choices and musical adjustments as his career progressed. These qualities demonstrate a continuity and maturity in Sanders's music and development that contradicts what I feel are often inadequate, and at times narrow-minded, critical responses to his work.

Along with this, some in the jazz community, including musicians, writers, and individuals involved in the "business" of jazz, have often been party to controversies regarding the relative worth of various styles, and certainly the jazz avant-garde, as well as other styles, have been marginalized.[8] How Sanders has at times been presented in the media is an example of these controversies, which I discuss later in the section on his critical reception. Perpetuating these seemingly arbitrary boundaries is detrimental to the music and to musicians such as Sanders (and most of us for that matter) who do not fit into one neat category, as well as to the larger world of the arts, scholarship, and well beyond. In fact, there are no neat stylistic categories, and such terms most often mean very little to musicians. An artist who manages to bridge these divides, and thankfully, this is becoming more the rule than the exception, provides a valuable service.

Live Live

During his performances at Sweet Basil, I vividly remember being completely overwhelmed by Sanders, along with Hicks, Muhammad (both frequent collaborators of Sanders's), and Booker: together, they comprised a solid, fierce, and aggressive quartet.[9] The music played by this group seems to epitomize the journey of Sanders's career, along with the beauty, soul, and personal approach to spirituality that his playing has always exuded.

The choice of rhythm section players is crucial of course, and the approach of Hicks, Booker, and Muhammad was modern yet conventional, with a powerful straight-ahead swing—these are not players whose work has been associated with the avant-garde. Yet

[7]I discuss this tendency extensively in my discussion of the critical reception of Sanders.

[8]John Gennari has documented the history of jazz criticism in a remarkable manner, including the various ways that styles have been portrayed, and at times marginalized, in the media: See John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006). For example, chapter 6, "The Shock of the New: Black Freedom, the Counterculture, and 1960s Criticism" (251–298), examines the manner in which the avant-garde was marginalized by some critics and musicians.

[9]The memory of these performances is what inspired me to discuss this group at the Society for American Music annual meeting in 2013 when Pharoah Sanders was honored in his hometown of Little Rock, Arkansas. This article is an expansion of that talk. Thank you to Gabriel Solis, the anonymous readers, and the *Jazz Perspectives* editorial staff for their help and encouragement regarding this article. Also, thank you to John Wriggle and Kwami Coleman who took time to make helpful and thorough comments on my drafts.

this rhythm section provided a perfect base for Sanders to blend straight-ahead and free-oriented styles. In addition, although he didn't verbally interact much with the audience, the sets were very "show-like." The performances were audience-oriented, as the sets were constructed largely to create an energy and build upon it. Those in attendance vociferously responded with excitement and enthusiasm. The band was extremely successful with this format, and the crowds consistently were ecstatic as the intensity increased throughout each set. For this listener, having been familiar with Sanders's earlier playing from records as well as other performances, the show-like atmosphere and swinging rhythm section was quite surprising, and, to say the least, extremely entertaining as well as inspiring.

I am not alone in my enthusiasm regarding Sanders's music of the late 1970s and early 1980s, yet it is interesting to note how the literature surrounding Sanders varies throughout the years. As I discuss later, contemporary criticism harkens back positively to Sanders's early work with Coltrane as well as his early work on records such as *Karma* and its "The Creator Has a Master Plan," seemingly avoiding, discounting, or ignoring the work of the late 1970s and early 1980s. But during the 1980s, the critical reception of his earlier work was frequently negative, while lauding his more straight-ahead work of the late '70s and early '80s. While critical writings on Sanders come from a variety of perspectives, most writers have tended to be rather one-dimensional in their approach to his music and career.

Overview of Pharoah Sanders's Stylistic and Professional Development

When the average jazz fan thinks about Pharoah Sanders, I believe the two things that generally come to mind are his work with John Coltrane in the mid-1960s, and the approach that he initiated with "The Creator Has a Master Plan" in the late 1960s on the album *Karma*. Of course Sanders has gone on to a long and productive career since then and continues to play, record, and tour, primarily with a quartet. He has also more recently participated in a number of other musical situations, including working with Moroccan and other North African musicians collaborating with producer Bill Laswell, playing and recording with one of the leading contemporary alto saxophone players, Kenny Garrett, as well as with cornetist-composer Rob Mazurek. To all of these Sanders has always brought his signature sound: a rich, powerful, expressive, tone—including the use of mulitphonics[10]—but also a clear voice and style that articulates itself in any context, as is heard in the following recordings. In this section, I'd like to briefly consider some of the major developmental milestones in his career that led to his mature style in the late 1970s and early 1980s that we hear documented on *Live*.

[10]Multiphonics is an all-purpose term, in this case referring to a saxophone technique that allows several pitches to sound at one time based upon the overtone series. Sax players use fingering techniques, as well as manipulation of the throat at times, to split a note, usually in the upper register, in various ways to create a sound made up of multiple pitches. Also, along the same lines, some players do something referred to as overblowing in the upper register, in a way forcing the note to split and creating a multiphonic effect. These multiphonics can sound like one note, but richer, or can clearly sound like multiple pitches.

Meditations

When he first played with John Coltrane, Sanders was a young player thrown into one of the most important groups in jazz. This group's music challenged the most experienced player and listener with its extended soloing, unfamiliar harmonic vocabulary, and, at the time, an unheard of and unique intensity.[11] It was squarely within the confines of the avant-garde, yet Coltrane's playing was based, in a stretched and advanced manner, in a traditional harmonic idiom, often including the use of chord progression cycles and a wide variety of scales and modes not normally, particularly at this time, associated with jazz. This is exemplified by the beginning of *Meditations* (1966),[12] the Coltrane album that featured his quartet with the addition of Sanders and drummer Rashied Ali.[13]

Coltrane and Sanders play together during the opening of "The Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost," the album's opening track. They initially create a rhythmically and harmonically free texture with Sanders playing almost a light squealing drone, which he continues as Coltrane moves from a "free" feel into a straightforward melodic line (0:47), primarily sequenced through various keys by the movement of perfect fifths and minor 3rds, moving through all major keys except B and A♭ (Example 1). Coltrane then transitions to a combination of the free texture and the melodic line (for example, 2:11). The music quickly becomes rhythmically and harmonically free again and is in a free jazz or avant-garde style, a relatively new style for the quartet (though it was also heard on the earlier *Ascension*), and one that McCoy Tyner and Elvin Jones were not particularly comfortable with, as evidenced by the fact that this was their last recording with the band.[14]

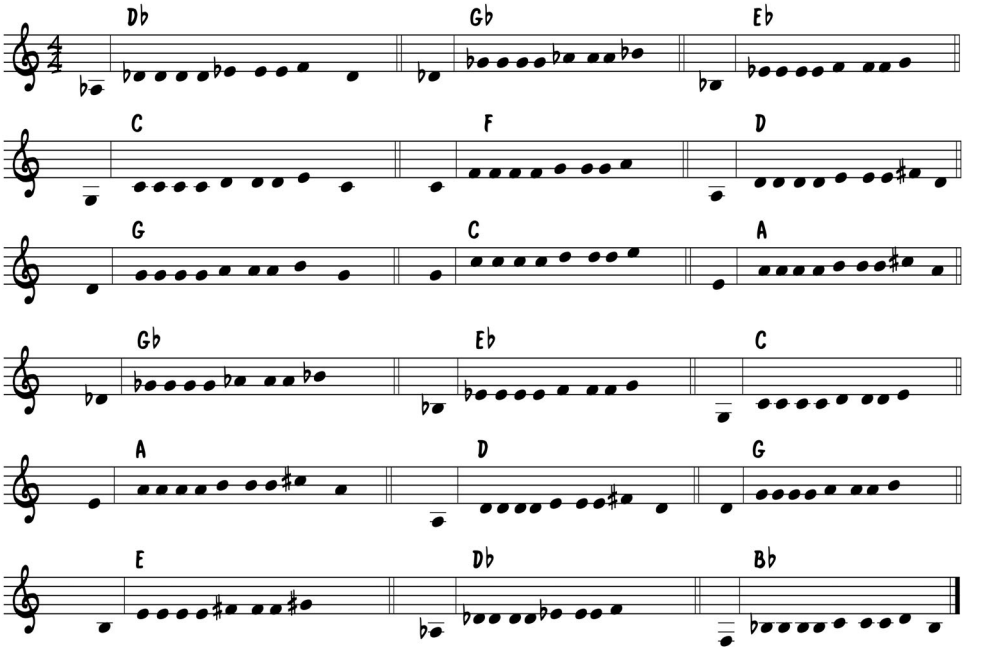
Coltrane plays a solo over the same texture as Sanders drops out. Sanders then reenters for a solo as Coltrane drops out (6:28); the solo largely consists of shrieks in the upper register, with little intention of being in any sort of pitch world. Coltrane joins in again as the free, intense, and roiling quality continues. The initial texture of

[11]Issues surrounding Sanders's tenure with Coltrane are beyond the purview of this article and have been examined in many places by many people. This, however, was a difficult and fraught period in Coltrane's life and career, and Sanders was helping Coltrane's performance. When asked about Sanders's role in his band during an interview with Frank Kofsky, Coltrane stated: "Well, it helps me. It helps me stay alive sometimes, because physically, man, the pace I've been leading has been so hard, and I've gained so much weight. That sometimes it's been a little hard physically. I feel that I like to have somebody there in case I can't get that strength. I like to have that strength in that band, somewhere. And Pharoah is very strong in spirit and will, see, and these are the things that I like to have up there." See Frank Kofsky, "John Coltrane—Interview by Frank Kofsky," *Jazz and Pop*, September 1967. Reprinted in *Black Giants*, eds. Pauline Rivelli and Robert Levin (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1970), 31.

[12]John Coltrane, *Mediations*, Impulse! A-9110, 1966, LP.

[13]The "quartet" discussed here is Coltrane's "classic" quartet consisting of Coltrane, pianist McCoy Tyner, drummer Elvin Jones, and bassist Jimmy Garrison.

[14]Lewis Porter, discussing Coltrane's music becoming more avant-garde as he began adding other players to the quartet, including for *Meditations*, states: "Both Jones and Tyner were unhappy with the group's moving away from a steady beat. As daring as they are, the one thing they both relied on was a steady and propulsive beat to work off. Despite their innovations, they were not 'free jazz' players." Porter also quotes both players expressing having difficulty hearing themselves or finding ways to contribute to the music as the group expanded and became more free. See Porter, *John Coltrane*, 266–267.



Example 1: John Coltrane's sequenced passage in "The Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost" (beginning at 0:47)**.** Coltrane repeats some of these sequences twice in a row. The rhythm is essentially the same for each but is slightly altered throughout. While the band is not playing in a particular meter (the time is free), the melody has a clear 4/4 implication while also having a rubato feel. (Written at concert pitch.)

this part returns with Sanders's squealing drone and Coltrane alternating between his own drone and a few pieces of the melody (for example, 10:51) as the band gradually winds down and moves into the second track on the album, "Compassion." This combination of avant-garde techniques—the primary texture here because of the lack of steady rhythm as well as alternative saxophone techniques—and elements of traditional tonal harmony—represented by the sequenced melody—was perhaps already influencing Sanders. It hints at the eventual creation of his own approach, which would combine these styles, but in a simpler, more generally accessible, and less overtly avant-garde manner that is a hallmark of his post-Coltrane work.

Karma

"The Creator Has a Master Plan," which comprises the majority of Sanders's 1969 album *Karma*,[15] was composed by Pharoah Sanders with lyrics by Leon Thomas, and has been performed and recorded by numerous

[15]Pharoah Sanders, *Karma*, Impulse! AS-9181, 1969, LP.

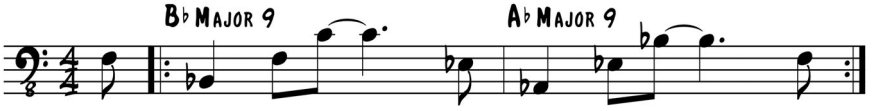
musicians.[16] The piece is a unique blend of avant-garde stylings, harmonically oriented lyricism, Afrocentrism, and, as was also fitting for the late 1960s, exudes a sense of a meditative non-denominational spirituality. Sanders's simpler style of melodic playing here is a clear move away from his role with Coltrane; Sanders embraces Coltrane's lyricism—in a more traditional manner—without the expansive harmonic explorations that Coltrane was known for, particularly as Coltrane's harmonic investigations moved more towards the avant-garde late in his career.

With this recording Sanders reached out to his audience with a sense of warmth and beauty, something that was more difficult to locate in Coltrane's intensely searching late-period music. This was a radical departure from what Sanders was doing just three years before with Coltrane, but also maintained a connection to the avant-garde. This is music that reached beyond the traditional jazz audience, as evidenced by its popularity—it sold well—and the fact that it reached a particularly wide range of listeners that included the largely white rock concert audiences and black audiences, an unusually broad spectrum.[17] Other groups did this in their own way, of course. A notable example is tenor saxophonist Charles Lloyd in the mid-1960s (for example with *Dream Weaver* and *Forest Flower*) who was extremely popular at this time with an audience of both jazz and popular music fans.

The performance of "Creator" consisted of extended solos, and the recording of the piece is almost 33 minutes long, reminiscent of Coltrane's live performances at this time, as well as late recordings in this regard (consider, for example, *Om*, recorded in 1965, which consisted of two parts that combined resulted in a nearly 30 minute long track). Sanders, however, created a unique sound and style with "Creator," seemingly moving on very quickly after Coltrane's death. Largely because of the length of the track and the fact that there are numerous sections with a variety of "feels," the form seems more complicated than it actually is, and the recording can be broken down into an introduction, melody, a return to the introduction as an interlude, and solos (based upon the progression of the melodic section), or ABAB. The introduction, A, is rubato, and Sanders sets an interesting tone for the piece with his intense and rough-edged signature sound, yet he plays with a lyrical "inside" approach, freely exploring the tonalities of the section (A♭ minor, B♭ minor, and E♭ minor, with the E♭ minor serving as a tonic, creating a variation of a typical I–IV–V progression). While there are clear tonal areas and even the feel of a progression, the A section has a "free" feel to it, largely because of the lack of a steady beat, and, like the rest of the tune, has a bed of percussion as an underpinning.

[16]For example, trumpeter Don Cherry, pianist Jessica Williams, guitarist Jimmy Ponder, drummer-producer Norman Connors (discussed below in relation to his work with Sanders), and Latin-oriented versions by Bobby Matos and his Heritage Ensemble and The Latin Jazz Quartet.

[17]Ashley Kahn states that a new generation of listeners helped *Karma* outsell many rock records, and that "'The Creator' stands as one of Impulse's [the jazz record label] most recognized tracks." See Ashley Kahn, *The House That Trane Built: The Story of Impulse Records* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 207.



Example 2: Bass line, "The Creator Has a Master Plan" (beginning at 1:56).

The second section, B (1:56), begins with Reggie Workman's bass vamp (presumably, since Workman played regularly with Sanders, though Richard Davis also played bass on the recording) that essentially defines this tune, moving between B♭ major 9 and A♭ major 9 (parallel majors to two of the chords in the A section—Example 2). It's important to note that a bass vamp and two-chord progressions both became important strategies for Sanders throughout his career. The bass line is fifths-based, B♭–F–C and A♭–E♭–B♭, creating an open sound. Sanders continues to blow simply and melodically inside the two tonalities over the vamp.

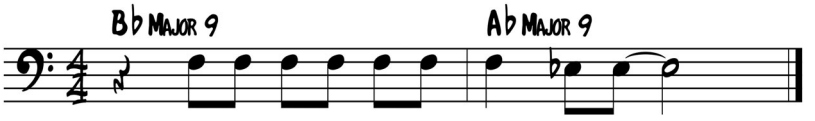
The band, including flute and French horn (largely playing obbligatos), continues with a meditative vibe until Leon Thomas's vocal (7:25). He sings the initial melody of the chorus wordlessly first, and it couldn't be much simpler, consisting of two notes, F and E♭ (Example 3). The lyrics of the chorus, which speak to the "Creator's" plan for "peace and happiness," are innocent in their straightforward sincerity that embraces an open approach to spirituality that was present during this period.

Thomas completes this vocal section with his distinctive yodeling technique, essentially a solo that is bookended by the wordless melody. This section has an openness about it—no one is in a hurry and Sanders and Thomas leave plenty of space during their solo spots; so much so that, other than Thomas's delivery of the lyrics, they almost don't feel like solos, but rather they play (and sing) as if they are merely another element of the overall texture.

The A rubato section that opened the recording returns (11:10), concluding nine minutes of vamping on the B♭ major 9 to A♭ major 9 progression. It is interesting to note that up until now, while the texture is a rhythmically free one, Sanders has done little in the way of free playing. An interesting aspect of his style that had come together at this point in his career is that even in his melodic playing his intensity and sound somehow still imparts a free jazz feel.

B, the main body of the tune (12:54), is based upon the vamp of the B section (see Example 2). It differs, however, as throughout the rest of the recording it moves back and forth between the vamp feel and free textures. Sanders initially plays simple melodies over the vamp and percussion texture, but the intensity gradually increases, eventually going into his piercing upper register, including the use of multiphonics, while remaining within the tonal centers.

When the tempo abruptly becomes faster (15:30), Sanders, for the first time, begins to depart from the "inside" textures and the piece becomes more energetic and less controlled, while also remaining attached to the melody and chords. It then devolves harmonically (beginning at 16:00) and briefly leaves the harmonic



Example 3: Initial melodic line for the lyrics of "The Creator Has a Master Plan" (7:25).

feel (beginning at 16:40) before quickly returning to it (gradually around 17:25). This basic process continues throughout this section, and Thomas re-enters as part of the overall fabric combining melodic lines with his yodeling. The energy and intensity gradually increases as Sanders's playing becomes more energetic and freer, until the texture finally becomes more of what would normally be thought of as free jazz during this period, reminiscent of Sanders's previous work with Coltrane. In fact, even though this section moves back and forth between free and tonal textures, it feels "free" even during the tonal sections because, for example, everyone is playing (and Thomas singing) in a polyphonic fashion, as is common in free jazz playing. The original tempo returns (28:15), the vocal is restated, and the tune fades out. This second free-oriented B section is a tie backwards to his experience with Coltrane's group, while also opening his style (or re-opening if we consider his playing before Coltrane) to tonal, or inside, playing as Sanders eventually brings these elements into the tonal section as he continues to combine his melodicism with free elements. Importantly, pianist Lonnie Liston Smith is crucial to defining the tonal regions as when they are present he generally plays in a straightforward manner that clearly defines the progressions.

Most musicians who experienced the kind of success (such as record sales, regular performances for large audiences, steady work) that he did with "Creator" are sensitive, as was Sanders I believe, to what their audiences and the marketplace were telling them. In fact, he has spoken of his desire to connect with his audience.[18] He did not stop there, however, and continued to expand and develop his approach, making aesthetic choices while also being a savvy businessman. This kind of balancing act eluded many in the jazz avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s, making Sanders and his music all the more important as a case study of experimental artists who wish to engage the musical mainstream. As we will see, this is a trend that Sanders will continue to explore in his subsequent work.

Thembi

"Thembi," the title track of the album of the same name,[19] is a direct descendent of "Creator," as its lovely main theme—and the entire tune—has the same two-chord progression of the main section of "Creator," B♭ major to A♭ major (again one bar

[18]See Ashley Kahn, "Jewels of Thought: The Pharoah Sanders Interview," *Jazz Times*, February 2008, 94, Sanders states: "I try to uplift the people in the audience and bring them into the music. … It's a very spiritual kind of thing."
[19]Pharoah Sanders, *Thembi*, Impulse! AS-9206, 1971, LP.

apiece), showing us a continued use of vamps. It is likely that Sanders was trying to replicate the aesthetic and commercial success of "Creator," while also, from a musical standpoint, remaining in a place where he was comfortable. At seven minutes long, the tune is much shorter than others discussed so far, adding to its accessibility. Sanders plays soprano saxophone, and here, in contrast to "Creator," we hear Sanders playing entirely "inside" the chord progression and playing quite melodically, at times drawing on the melody for his solo, completely eschewing his avant-garde style that was still present in "Creator," and forming a stark contrast with *Meditations* and his other avant-garde playing. "Thembi" therefore functions as a kind of mid-point between Sanders's early avant-garde playing and the mixture of avant-garde and straight-ahead approaches in his later career.

"Thembi" is an extremely simple and straightforward tune, consisting of introduction (0:00), melody—a four-bar phrase repeated four times (0:42), Sanders's solo (1:05), a short piano solo (4:30), another Sanders solo (5:21), and concludes with the band vamping out. In most ways, considering the time period and the band personnel, this is quite traditional, making this about as strong a contrast with *Meditations* as possible. While "Creator" began with a free section, "Thembi" immediately starts with a bass vamp with percussion and Lonnie Liston Smith strumming the strings of the piano; the overall texture is clearly reminiscent of the strategy used with "Creator." Both the bass vamp and two-chord progressions help to define the style and genre of the music. Sanders plays a simple and pretty melody over the chord progression and moves directly into a long solo. Smith's short piano solo is also completely inside as the bass continues to vamp. When Sanders comes back in soloing over the vamp, the closest he comes to his avant-garde style is the use of his multiphonics technique on the soprano, while still, however, playing inside and hinting at the melody.

Building on the success of "Creator," "Thembi" takes accessibility, both as a commercial and aesthetic decision, another large step forward. It maintains the heavy emphasis on various types of percussion while also keeping the tune mellow and pretty, and Sanders keeps the same two-chord style with a bass vamp that is so familiar in his music. He moves further away from any semblance of avant-garde techniques, as he and the band focus on the simple chord progression and an unapologetically melodic approach that is completely "inside" the chord changes. As an interesting note, however, "Red, Black & Green," from the same album, did have the combination of avant-garde and the "Creator" style, demonstrating that Sanders had not completely abandoned the use of avant-garde techniques, but rather was using them judiciously.

Finally, violinist Michael White's presence on violin is noteworthy on this record, as his work with The Fourth Way—White, keyboardist Mike Nock, drummer Eddie Marshall, and bassist Ron McClure—was important in the early development of jazz fusion during this period. Sanders was living in the San Francisco Bay Area during the 1970s where the group was active, and they were a popular and influential group that most local musicians were well aware of. As a result, Sanders was very likely familiar with the concept of jazz fusion, something he is flirting with here. This trend would continue with what might be Sanders's most overtly commercially oriented venture, the album *Love Will Find a Way*.

Love Will Find a Way

With "Answer Me My Love" from his 1978 album *Love Will Find a Way*,[20] Sanders was featured on a pop tune made famous by Nat King Cole in 1954 and recorded by many others—including such diverse artists as Joni Mitchell, Renée Fleming, Engelbert Humperdinck, Harry Connick, Jr., and Roy Orbison—transformed into an R&B/fusion tune.[21] After a pretty piano introduction, Sanders on soprano sax plays a rubato version of the tune with piano, including a fairly heavy reverb on Sanders's sound. Lush strings take us into the tune, played as a slow pop ballad with a full accompaniment of horns, strings, electric bass, and piano.

At the bridge (1:58) the band goes into a light R&B-funk groove, digging in a little harder as the drums play a stronger backbeat, and then back to the pop ballad feel for the last A section. For the solo (2:59) the rhythm section (now including electric guitar) hits a nice R&B-funk groove on two chords (Fm7–D♭7, one bar apiece), just as we have seen in other Sanders tunes we are examining. His edgy, overblown sound in the upper register fits here and ties his sound to not only the avant-garde but to R&B, a tradition he was familiar with from early in his career. This again displays his ability to cross and mix genres, and he sounds completely at home here, while also intimating how little these labels can and do mean to many, if not most, musicians. He ends the solo by going back to the bridge, still with the funk groove, then for the last A (5:06) again to the pop-ballad feel, and a final fade out as the band vamps. Sanders plays throughout the tune, giving this an entirely different feel, as he is functioning as featured artist and as the only soloist.

The 1970s was an exciting period in jazz, though not everyone in the jazz world appreciated some of the developments in the music, especially as related to the emergence of fusion. Certainly the album *Love Will Find a Way* shows Sanders playing in a fusion context of some type, which may seem incongruous given his work with Coltrane and his own records and performances as a leader. This record, however, fits right in with other fusion records at the time such as those by Bob James, Don Sebesky, Freddie Hubbard, Joe Farrell, George Benson, Hubert Laws, and drummer Idris Muhammad (discussed below in regards to Sanders's album *Live*), and much of this record would now fit loosely under the term smooth jazz.

There were also other tenor players who were having an impact on the scene with crossover material of different types at this time. Grover Washington's "Mr. Magic"

[20]Pharoah Sanders, *Love Will Find a Way*, Arista AB-4161, 1978, LP.

[21]Norman Connors, a drummer–composer-producer who played and recorded with Sanders a great deal, produced this album. Connors became known as an R&B and jazz producer, including producing hit records for a number of vocalists such as Jean Carn, Michael Henderson, and Phyllis Hyman (who is featured on *Love Will Find a Way*). The rhythm and horn arrangements for this tune were by trombonist-arranger Paul Riser. Riser played trombone on countless Motown recordings and arranged many as well, including iconic recordings such as Marvin Gaye's "I Heard it Through the Grapevine," The Temptations' "Papa Was a Rolling Stone" and "My Girl, and Smokey Robinson and the Miracles' "Tears of a Clown." As another example of the commercial nature of the album, it also includes an instrumental version of Marvin Gaye's "Got to Give it Up." The recording included prominent Los Angeles recording musicians such as trumpeter Chuck Findley and saxophonist Ernie Watts.

was ubiquitous among jazz, fusion, and R&B fans, and Stanley Turrentine (who also worked with drummer Idris Muhammad) and his sound and R&Bish approach was still a significant presence. The closest parallel, however, is tenor player Gato Barbieri whose career in the 1960s was intertwined with Sanders's in some ways, though Sanders takes care to note that they were doing different things.[22] They recorded together on *The Jazz Composers Orchestra* (1968) and both performed and recorded with Don Cherry, including Cherry's album, *Symphony for Improvisers* (1966). Interestingly, Barbieri's career had a similar trajectory as Sanders's, as he had turned to a more commercially accessible style at this time as well.[23] In addition, as mentioned above, tenor player Charles Lloyd had already set an example for a type of fusion and appeal to a non-jazz audience, and had shown the possibilities for a jazz artist to sell many records and perform in a variety of venues.

While this record could be seen as an attempt to "sell out," it is not actually that far from other things Sanders has done. It is, rather, simply a larger group with a more "produced" sound that fits a particular style of the day that was popular.[24] Again, this is a professional player playing the cards dealt to him by marketplace realities, while also continuing to develop as an artist.[25] At the time, Sanders was not signed to a major label and was in control of his career. He was also clearly well aware of Norman Connors's work in this vein and made a choice—if he hadn't wanted to do the R&Bish *Love Will Find a Way*, he wouldn't have done it. It is all part of a long and productive career.

Live

While Sanders was certainly capable of straight-ahead playing, from the recordings discussed so far it would still have been difficult to predict the continued transformation that led to the Pharoah Sanders Quartet of the early 1980s with pianist John Hicks, bassist Walter Booker, and drummer Idris Muhammad. This was a hard-swinging and experienced rhythm section. Hicks and Booker had played together with Betty Carter—including recording the 1976 *Now It's My Turn*—and Hicks had recently

[22]In Kahn, "Jewels of Thought," 97, Sanders was careful to insist that his and Barbieri's playing are different and should not be conflated or compared. Further, he resisted a question that lead towards assuming a Coltrane influence in a number of younger players, preferring to say that each had their own way of playing.

[23]An excellent example of this is Barbieri's 1974 album, *Chapter Three: Viva Emiliano Zapata* (GRP GRD-111, 1992, CD), arranged and conducted by Chico O'Farrill.

[24]By a "produced" sound, I am referring to the use of recording techniques that have more commonly been associated with popular music such as laying down rhythm section tracks and extensive overdubbing, along with audio compression and a more audible mastering process. This was a stylized sound in jazz at this time, used, for example, by CTI Records.

[25]Perhaps critical and commercial expectations are involved here. Saxophonist Stanley Turrentine, to cite one example, was always associated with soul jazz, which had a grounding in a more commercial arena than the avant-garde. As a result, when he transitioned to an even more commercially and fusion-oriented style with the CTI record label, no one really batted an eye. On the other hand, Sanders's more commercially oriented work such as *Love Will Find a Way*, perhaps because of his early association with the avant-garde and his success with "Creator," had a more complicated reception. Other musicians who had established themselves in more mainstream styles had similar difficulties, of course. Two obvious examples of upsetting expectations are Miles Davis and Herbie Hancock with their interest in the use of electronic instruments and popular music elements.

worked with her, as well as being Carter's musical director and playing on the 1979 live recording, *The Audience with Betty Carter* (Carter is discussed more below). They also worked together with tenor saxophonist Ricky Ford and alto player Richie Cole. Muhammad was a long-time and frequent collaborator with Sanders and was an in-demand drummer both in the clubs and the studios, including records with Fantasy Records and many with CTI. This trio would also go on to frequently record together. In a conversation with Sanders about this group—I mentioned to him over lunch how much I enjoyed this group and these shows—he spoke very highly of it and of his experience with them. According to Sanders, it was extra-musical issues that made him break this group up.[26] Over the years, however, the concept he displays here—and this group helped him to create it—continues, whether he is picking up a group or bringing one with him.

This group, with Ray Drummond replacing Booker on bass, recorded Sanders's 1980 album, *Journey to the One*.[27] *Live*, from live concerts on the West Coast in 1981 (with Booker returning on bass),[28] included three tunes from *Journey to the One*. *Journey*, however, pales in comparison to the performances on *Live*, as is usual with studio recordings as opposed to live dates, so we are fortunate to have a live record of this group and Sanders's playing and concept at this time. With this very experienced rhythm section, he became one of many players during this period who foretold what is now much more common than it was then: the ability to bring together free and straight-ahead approaches, and even a more commercial sound at times, in a completely integrated manner. He also learned from and harnessed the energy of Coltrane's presentation, resulting in a more traditional and audience-friendly performance.

The group and the high-powered, non-stop show it put on bring to my mind what might seem to be strange comparisons. The first is vocalist Betty Carter, who always put on a terrific show accompanied by a powerful and highly disciplined trio (including a trio with Hicks and Booker whose performances with Carter were also influential in my musical development in the late 1970s) that was well paced but essentially never let up, including extremely fast tempos that she pushed relentlessly.[29] Other comparisons are to James Moody (who also performed at Sweet Basil during this period) and trumpeters Dizzy Gillespie and Clark Terry, as they all created exciting and entertaining shows. Rahsaan Roland Kirk, the multi-instrumentalist (often playing several instruments at one time, in fact), is also an example of an outstanding and outgoing performer. Kirk, as does Sanders, brilliantly combined straight-ahead and the avant-garde while also putting on a riveting performance. These musicians were consummate performers who put considerable effort into connecting with their audience, each in a distinct manner. Finally, another perhaps odd comparison is to blues guitarist Albert Collins. In his live performances Collins would play extended solos as his tough and experienced rhythm section (including Chicago blues drummer Casey Jones, for

[26]Personal communication, 8 April 2013.
[27]Pharoah Sanders, *Journey to the One*, Theresa TR 108/109, 1980, LP.
[28]Pharoah Sanders, *Live*, Theresa TR 116, 1981, LP.
[29]Betty Carter was a dynamic, demanding, and demonstrative performer. During performances she drove the trio as she stared them down, pushing them to create more and more energy as the set progressed.

example) supported him with a steady and powerful groove. Both his group and Sanders's built energy throughout a tune and a set not so much by increasing the intensity, but by maintaining it over an extended tune, and even an entire set.

Sanders is different, of course, and along with finding his own voice as a player and finding the right musical contexts for it, he also found his own way to create a relationship with his audience. When I heard him he didn't entertain with his wit or pithy comments, but rather used a concept of non-stop energy and a driving intensity to connect with the crowd. The fact that even with his extended solos that had elements of free playing, he remained intimately connected to the mainstream, which differentiated these shows from avant-garde performances. The audiences responded and were electric.[30]

Seeing Sanders with this group was a revelatory experience. It sticks with me viscerally, and the power of it still engenders a physical memory as well as a musical one. A good example of the power of Sanders and this group is "Doktor Pitt," a twenty-one minute track from a 1981 live performance documented on *Live*, recorded in San Francisco at The Great American Music Hall.[31] The tune begins with Sanders stating the melody—an eight-bar phrase played in D major and E♭ major—interestingly, the parallel majors of the minor (or Dorian) modal progressions of Coltrane's "Impressions" and Miles Davis's "So What," and a variation of the notion of a two-chord progression that we have heard Sanders use regularly. He begins alone with the rhythm section gradually joining in, and then Sanders launches into his solo. Like on "Thembi," Sanders plays largely inside the harmony while also using actual pieces of the tune's melody in this extended solo (nearly seven minutes long). Sanders, however, mixes this with extensive use of avant-garde techniques such as multiphonics, "sheets of sound,"[32] guttural explosions, piercing and powerful upper register notes that are at times almost un-pitched, and a non-stop and aggressive approach, He does so, however, in a manner that fits the straight-ahead approach of the tune and the rhythm section, injecting the tune with what has become his signature approach: a hybrid—or fusion—of his straight-ahead and avant-garde playing.

During his solo, Sanders frequently references the melody and, most importantly, he shifts effortlessly between lyricism and free playing throughout. Even his avant-garde techniques, however, are used in an "inside" manner. For example, in the middle of his solo Sanders employs the multiphonics that he is widely known for, rich with overtones, as he holds long, high notes (for example, 4:46–5:25). Rather than sounding "out," however, they shift chromatically as the eight bar phrases alternate tonalities.

[30]I am writing in the past tense here, but Sanders of course continues to tour and perform.

[31]"Doktor Pitt," an additional track added on to a CD re-release of *Live* (Evidence ECE 22223-2, 2003, CD) was recorded live at the Great American Music Hall in San Francisco in April 1981. The tune is named for Allen Pittman, a Bay Area trumpet player (and a research chemist, hence the "Doktor"). Pittman founded Theresa Records to provide opportunities for musicians to record. All of the players from this quartet recorded on the label extensively, and Hicks and Muhammad also recorded with their own groups on the label. A video of this performance of "Doktor Pitt" is also available on an Evidence DVD.

[32]"Sheets of sound" is a term used originally to describe Coltrane's style. It refers to using very fast strings of notes and arpeggios that emphasize a particular tonality or pitch. The term is generally credited to Ira Gitler, writing in the liner notes for Coltrane's 1958 recording *Soultrane*. See Porter, *John Coltrane*, 111.

Other techniques include screaming on a pitch or using a "sheets-of-sound" approach that emphasizes a pitch or the overall tonality, while also sounding a bit "out" (5:39–6:07). At two points (4:56–5:12 and 6:40), Sanders's saxophone alternates with his vocalizing of similar pitches, letting us feel his complete involvement and uncontainable passion, while also showing that his horn is just an extension of his voice (or vice-versa). He increases his intensity throughout the solo, though it has its ebbs and flows, but the rhythm section burns unflaggingly behind him.

In fact, a crucial element in this hybrid is the rhythm section. Walter Booker and Idris Muhammad are locked in and lay down a powerful, swinging groove throughout Sanders's solo. John Hicks uses McCoy Tyner-like quartal voicings as he comps, but unlike Tyner, he almost never strays from the tonal centers of D major and E♭ major, as Sanders's quartet is not using the type of tonal wandering that Coltrane and his group developed. When Hicks takes over with his own extended solo (nearly six minutes, beginning at 7:05), again, he stays within the tonal centers of D major and E♭ major except for occasional flurries at the height of his solo. Hicks stays inside the harmony, playing the same set of voicings throughout underneath a fleet and melodic solo. The same is true for Booker's walking bass line. While the energy necessarily lightens up without Sanders, the rhythm section continues to smoke, and Hicks builds to a climax, leading up to Idris Muhammad's drum solo. The drum solo is melodic in nature and very groove oriented and follows the eight-measure-based form clearly. Muhammad sets up the melody and Sanders and the band come back in (15:52) with another Sanders six-minute solo that is taken to a fever pitch, emphasizing the use of avant-garde techniques discussed above, while also mixing in pieces of the melody as they take the tune out.

Critical Reception

Discussing Sanders's music in the manner above allows us to see his musical and professional development, including his approach to developing a style—one that draws upon both experimental and mainstream techniques—and an audience. To contextualize beyond my observations, however, I have examined the literature surrounding Sanders's career, though there is surprisingly little. Discussing writers' work out of the context of a particular article or even an entire critical career is of course problematic, and interviews present certain challenges as well since musicians frequently give different answers to different people for a variety of reasons. In examining the critical reception of Sanders I have attempted to balance critics' perspectives with those of Sanders himself; this comparison yields some fascinating observations about Sanders's own views of his music, which have remained remarkably consistent over the years.

Jazz writers have tended to avoid assessing Sanders's career in total; instead, they generally concentrate on one period of his career (the 1960s), or choose a particular angle (such as the influence of Coltrane on his career). As a result, an important element of Sanders's career that has been largely overlooked is the manner in which he negotiates his position as a professional performer in the context of the *business*

of music. Most musicians at any professional level feel they have a calling and a burning need to be creative—that is a given. But professionals also want to succeed financially. Artists are continually making choices regarding how best to have their music be profitable, and Sanders is no different. Examining Sanders's musical development, along with understanding his music more fully, necessarily illuminates important issues regarding aesthetic and career choices he has made along the way.

Ashley Kahn, in the introduction to his 2008 interview with Sanders published in *Jazz Times*, articulates some of this perspective by looking more practically at Sanders's overall career trajectory, taking into account his musical development:

> The white-bearded veteran's music has long since grown to a full range of moods and styles. It was way back in the late '60s, after his profile was raised high by a two-year stint in John Coltrane's final lineup, that Sanders began to expand his sound. Subsequent recordings, on Impulse! Records in the '70s, and a succession of independent labels through the '80s and '90s, brought forth an accessible, at times gentle, fusion of R&B, soul and world influences.[33]

Overall, the reception of Sanders is predictably split between those that appreciated free jazz, or the avant-garde, and those that didn't. But the critical reception of Sanders is also impacted by the fact that he emerged at a particular moment when there were many debates and controversies in politics, society, music, and the arts in general, as well as within jazz criticism (all trends that have changed very little, if at all, to the present day). John Gennari concisely contextualizes the politicization of black music in the 1960s while he also notes that jazz had been politicized all the way back to the 1930s:

> But the 1960s stands out as a period of especially intense politicization and fervent debate overshadowed by the larger political and social events convulsing U.S. society, especially the struggle for freedom embodied in the African American civil rights and black nationalist campaigns of the period. The shock of the new in this period was about more than aesthetics and taste: it was about the new politics of black assertion in the public sphere, the politics of racial presence and voice in what continues to be a white-dominated critical and commercial establishment.[34]

Consequently, another predictable result was that during this period some writers tended to use the music, at least partially, as a means towards furthering their political agendas. This is true for Amiri Baraka and others such as Ron Welburn, who were either involved with or supportive of the principles behind such initiatives as the Black Arts Movement, black cultural nationalism, and Afrocentricism. An examination of these works indicates that Sanders, too, was placed squarely within the middle of such discourses. Baraka has written rather extensively on Sanders (as will be discussed below), more than any other critic, in fact, and proved to be one of his great supporters.

Another perspective comes from white critics who were essentially supportive of more avant-garde black music, but that often served a larger political agenda as well; one such individual is the controversial critic and Marxist historian, Frank Kofsky,

[33]Kahn, "Jewels of the Thought," 94.
[34]Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool*, 253.

whose interview with John Coltrane serves as an excellent example of this strain of writing about jazz and politics in the 1960s. Coltrane, however, failed to give Kofsky what he was clearly angling for in his questions regarding how politics and racial issues informed his music. While being polite and articulate even in the midst of these leading questions, Coltrane generally avoided attributing political, social, or racial issues to his musical expression, at least in the direct manner that the questions were posed, offering more nuanced and careful positions.[35] The politics of the day, as well as their personal approaches to spirituality, undoubtedly affected both Coltrane and Sanders and their music, but how this might be reflected in their musical output is not well documented. It seems that both men were quite aware of their interviewers' desire to further their own personal views on these issues through their music and for the most part chose not to be a part of that process.

In Sanders's case, for example, Elisabeth van der Mei asked him leading questions about critical views regarding the "new thing." In response, he carefully avoided discussing this critical commentary and focused on his music:

> What I do now conveys whatever has been done before and I am trying to put the music beyond all that. … Personally I am trying to be honest with what I'm doing. I am trying to live in a peaceful way and if anybody else can get anything out of my way of living, my way of expressing that state of mind—if they can use it, then that's good. I'm not trying to convince anybody that what I'm doing is better than what they might be doing. But if we can communicate we might learn from each other.[36]

When van der Mei speaks of listeners who hear violence and hatred in the "new music," Sanders simply replies:

> I suppose that must be what they get from it. I don't really know what they're thinking. … And they don't need to listen, really, if they don't want to. I know for myself, if I go some place and I don't like what's happening, I don't stay—but if I do like it, I stay.[37]

Van der Mei continues in this vein and asks about the civil rights situation and its relationship to his music. Sanders replies:

> It's not about race—it's about music. I really don't know too well what is happening there. … And I am just trying to play my horn and make music and I have a hard time keeping up with that. To bring out what's inside of me seems the only solution. We

[35]In an initial line of questioning during their interview, Coltrane carefully and politely avoided Kofsky's apparent hope to engage in a political discussion about race and jazz. Regarding the label "the new black music," Coltrane stated: "Phrases, I don't know. They don't mean much to me, because usually I don't make the phrases, so I don't react too much. It makes no difference to me one way or the other what it's called." When pressed on his preferences regarding the racial mix of his audience, Coltrane simply replied: "Sometimes people like it or don't like it, no matter what color they are." When asked if he consciously tried to express his feelings about current political issues, Coltrane acknowledged that they were "definitely important," but essentially dodged the question by stating: "Well, I tell you for myself, I make a conscious attempt, I think I can truthfully say that in music I make or I have tried to make a conscious attempt to change what I've found in music." Kofsky, *Black Giants*, 25–26.

[36]Elisabeth van der Mei, "Pharoah Sanders: A Philosophical Conversation With Elisabeth van der Mei," *Coda*, August 1967, 4.

[37]Ibid., 3.

> have to bring out God. God is everything, he is all colours and that's really not so important. … And I really don't want to be worried about anything, newspapers, Vietnam, like that. I like to feel free.[38]

Reviews of Sanders's specific works, including *Karma* and *Journey to the One*, came largely from white critics who seemed to have little understanding or appreciation for the various stages of Sanders's career. In addition, more recent discussions of his music seemed to only reluctantly appreciate his work of the late 1970s and early 1980s. This is also true for the one review of *Live* (by Frank-John Hadley, to be discussed below), which is both lauding and dismissive at the same time.

Examining reviews of Sanders's music, found mostly in jazz publications such as *Down Beat* and *Coda*, has been a frustrating experience for one who is so engaged with Sanders's music. But then again, I seem to find many reviews in these publications problematic. The most frustrating aspect of these reviews, however, was that many of them are as much a reflection of the sometimes limited historical perspectives of jazz critics, as well as styles of writing that are seemingly intended to be unnecessarily provocative to the point of derision; put another way, they often say more about the writers' attitudes and inclinations than they do about Sanders and his music.[39]

My personal experience has been that my friends and colleagues, unless they heard Sanders at this time, are simply unaware of the straight-ahead groups that he led during the early 1980s. Consequently, one of the most interesting things to me in my examination of the literature has been that critical responses to Sanders's work of the early 1980s, in the few reviews there were at the time, were of an almost relieved fashion, as if to say Sanders is finally doing something worthwhile. This is true both for critics that were sympathetic to the avant-garde and those that were not. Conversely, contemporary writings on Sanders tend to laud Sanders freely, particularly heaping praise on his early work while also finding interest in recent collaborations. Interestingly, they essentially skip over his five Theresa Records label albums of the 1980s.

Frank-John Hadley's 1983 generally positive review of *Live* is the only review (contemporary to its release) I have found of the record, and it's interesting to note that there is not more discussion of this album in reviews or the critical literature regarding Sanders. Unfortunately his review reveals more about Hadley's pre-conceived notions of Sanders's approach than it does about the record. Not to single out Hadley, but as it is the only review of a record that I am focusing on I feel the need to discuss it at more

[38]Ibid., 3.

[39]When asked in an interview about critics' roles in helping or hurting avant-garde jazz, Sanders replied: "Well, I think the critics hurt it, you know. I think they seem to be against the music. They wrote wrongly about the music and they didn't even know anything about the musicians. They really hurt a lot of musicians. It was an awful job—to just write about the music and not think about the person playing the music. Sure made a person feel bad. That's the sad part, you know. That's why a lot of people now feel like, in *Down Beat*, most of the critics don't seem to know anything about how a person feels or know anything about why he plays his music. I think this is a dangerous thing for anybody to talk about somebody else this way. It's against the laws of creation. I think it's a very, very dangerous thing for critics to be paid to talk about you. I think that's what it's all about. Getting paid to try to eliminate a lot of people—artists, talent." Credited to Jazz and Pop (presumably Frank Kofsky), "Pharoah Sanders Interview by Jazz and Pop," *Jazz and Pop*, February 1970. Reprinted in *Black Giants*, 49.

length than I would otherwise be inclined, particularly as it articulates many aspects of the critical reception to Sanders's music.

Hadley's descriptions of Sanders (for example, speaking of Sanders's sound as "caterwauled multiphonics in the employ of rage") seem more like attempts at provocative writing than actual insight into the music. There is something important that can be gleaned from this, however, as it resonates with a common perspective in writings on Sanders, particularly from white critics. Specifically, it is implied that Sanders was essentially an unimportant player within the context of the avant-garde, who served mainly as a foil to Coltrane and then went on to a mediocre career of his own. Hadley states: "With Coltrane gone, Sanders failed to maintain the dynamism; his Impulse output is generally solemn, lifeless homage to Eastern holiness—even the screaky [*sic*] solo flights seem tired." Such a characterization epitomized Sanders, according to Hadley, until he becomes clearly more straight-ahead at this later juncture of his career. Hadley veers from negativity to say, "The recent Theresa double records *Journey to the One* and *Rejoice* are happy meeting places for restraint and abandon, ballads and modern jazz sprints; … *Live*, recorded early last year in Los Angeles and Santa Cruz, further evidences Sanders's resurgence."[40]

Hadley's need to write both positively and negatively about this experienced rhythm section, even though he seems to like them, is also confusing. He states: "Sanders uses the cloying word 'great' to acknowledge his fellow musicians to the audience. They're not, but criminally underrated pianist John Hicks has moments when he almost looms larger than life. … Drummer Idris Muhammad, free from the confines of fusion,[41] performs spiritedly, and bassist Walter Booker never lags. They enhance Sanders's wonderwork."[42]

Lars Gabel reviewed Sanders's *Journey to the One* for *Down Beat* positively in 1981, though, like Hadley, he seems to feel the need to balance praise with negative assessments of Sanders's earlier experimental work. He also poses a question that addresses one of the issues I raise in this article, yet he approaches it from a different perspective. Gabel states:

> *Journey* also raises some fundamental questions about the nature of Sanders's music, questions that have been dormant since the saxophonist stopped recording and performing regularly, but which now must be addressed before a second phase of his career can be fully launched. For one thing, it now seems doubtful whether Sanders was ever the avant-garde player he was made out to be 15 years ago. … Sanders was and is a supreme instrumentalist of rhythm and blues background, with mystical and romantic leanings and an expressionistic style ranging from Dionysian furor on the 'outside' of his instrument to intensely lyrical, tranquil moments of *karma* on the 'inside.' … Sanders is not to blame, obviously, for embodying two or more genres.[43]

[40]Frank-John Hadley, "Pharoah Sanders—*Live*," *Down Beat*, April 1983, 37–38.
[41]This is an allusion to the fact that, along with his jazz credits, Muhammad has been associated with fusion-oriented records as a sideman and leader for the CTI and Fantasy record labels.
[42]Hadley, "Pharoah," 38.
[43]Lars Gabel, "Pharoah Sanders—*Journey to the One*," *Down Beat*, January 1981, 34.

With the latter statement Gabel is implying, it seems, that embodying two or more genres is a bad thing, yet only the most conservative of musicians do not embody a variety of genres and influences. In reality, it's hard to imagine anyone who does not. Gabel goes on to say that he "cannot help wondering if Sanders' self-imposed exile was caused by his own failure to identify his *true position in jazz*."[44]

While I agree that applying the label avant-garde to Sanders is not necessarily the best choice (the problematic issue of labeling, such as pigeonholing Sanders as avant-garde or not, is central to this entire discussion), Gabel and I have different reasons for believing this to be so. Though he doesn't articulate it particularly well, Gabel implies that Sanders's work with Coltrane was weak (" … either he or Coltrane kept the wrong company!?") and seems to speak negatively of music of the 1960s (" … the musical trenches dug in the late '60s between the 'New Thing' and traditional styles").[45] My position is that as a professional player Sanders has done many things (including merging "new thing" and more traditional styles quite well), with his avant-garde experience being one of them. Calling this early 1980s period the launching of a second phase displays a lack of understanding regarding the professional and creative life of a musician, and more particularly, the overall arc of Sanders's career itself. Our lives generally don't go in "phases," but rather are continuous and individualistic evolutions. Others impose the notion of phases. Gabel further shows little understanding of a musician's long career through a need for Sanders to occupy a "position" in jazz, as if that is necessarily a musician's goal, when in fact that is again something that is also imposed by others or by the need or desire to place oneself for commercial reasons.

Gabel goes on to heap praise upon the recording, particularly upon Sanders's playing: "*Journey*, then confirms that Pharoah Sanders continues to command one of the richest, loveliest and fiercest tenor sounds in all of jazz. The immediacy and almost tactile intimacy of his tone and intonation again are stunningly employed to serve the awesome emotional power that is Sanders' ultimate contribution."[46] At the same time he continues to criticize the recording for its conservatism (despite the fact that he also dismissed Sanders's earlier avant-garde playing) as well as his "religious invocations and chants of peace" that Gabel refers to as "anachronistic."[47] His latter comments and negative attributions in this regard place his perspective at sharp odds with Sanders himself, and his clearly stated desire to be a voice for peace with his music (not an anachronistic ideal), and make Gabel's voice and critical judgment suspect in the context of Sanders's music. It is as if he assumes that there is no place for spirituality in music and that he perhaps is more of the belief that music is for music's sake alone. He also, as did Hadley, manages to find fault with both Muhammad and Hicks, whose playing "only adds to the emotional thickness." He ends by saying that the album is "pointing to a number of unexplored directions for Sanders," and that "the saxophonist still has a lot to say, and that it does not have to be in the language

[44]Ibid., 34. Emphasis added.
[45]Ibid., 34.
[46]Ibid., 34.
[47]Ibid., 34.

of pop or '60s 'New Thing.'" [48] The latter comment, while striking me as somewhat patronizing, is also a good example of some critics' difficulty in handling multiple musical perspectives from one artist.

In a review in *Coda* of a Sanders performance in Cleveland in July 1982, John Goldman similarly lauds Sanders's Theresa records, but, as did others, he mitigates the positive with a little dig: "You could hear in his last two Theresa albums that he had finally pulled things together while consolidating some of the stylistic techniques of middle-period Coltrane."[49] Here, as was the case with other critics, Goldman closely links Sanders and Coltrane, and continues to elaborate on this theme in a bit of a condescending fashion: "Since John is not around to play it for us anymore, it was indeed pleasant and satisfying to hear Pharoah do it so well."[50] Goldman does, however, seem (to some extent) to recognize the growth of Sanders's playing as part of a larger context of artistic development: "All in all Pharoah sounded better than he ever has and it was good to hear that solid tenor with occasional outside flavorings."[51] In a 1989 article in *Coda*, Fred Setterberg, also acknowledges the Theresa albums as a high point in Sanders's career. He refers to Pharoah's playing at this time as "far more accessible than ever before," and that "in recent years Pharoah has cultivated a new cadre of admirers through his superb recordings on Theresa Records … ."[52]

The perplexed nature of the critical reaction to Sanders in the early 1980s resonates with some critical reactions to Sanders at earlier stages of his career. For example, John Litweiler's *Down Beat* review of *Karma* would certainly not give any indication that "Creator" would go on to actually be a jazz and crossover hit, perhaps showing that Litweiler did not fully understand the nature of audiences and the music of the times (although, admittedly, not liking the record doesn't necessarily prove that). But the review is generally dismissive and insulting, and results in a one star rating. He calls the record "pretty ponderous," and states: "This LP is exhausting—waiting for something to happen takes a lot out of a listener." Further, Litweiler writes: "Given the overloaded context, Sanders' cultivated hysteria, and the music's lack of event, this LP might stand as jazz's answer to *Also Sprach Zarathustra*."[53] Litweiler is not clear on what he means by "overloaded context," nor is the Strauss analogy fully explained, but it's clear that these comments are not meant to be positive.[54]

Not satisfied with dismissing only the recording, Litweiler states that "Sanders never was an original tenorist," though he allows that Sanders "did play imaginative solos on some late-period Coltrane records so it's evident that he has a genuine talent."[55]

[48]Ibid., 34.
[49]Jon Goldman, "Pharoah Sanders, July 1–2, Schatzi's, Cleveland," *Coda*, October 1982, 30.
[50]Ibid., 30
[51]Ibid., 30.
[52]Fred Setterberg, "Pharoah Sanders: Two Decades in Pursuit of the Musical Truth," *Coda*, October/November 1989, 8–10.
[53]John Litweiler, "Pharoah Sanders—*Karma*," *Down Beat*, September 1969, 26.
[54]Perhaps Litweiler is expressing an opinion of the quality of Strauss's work as well as its relationship to Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.
[55]Litweiler, "Karma," 26.

Perhaps having been a supporter of avant-garde music (as well as later being the author of a biography of Ornette Coleman as well as a history of the free jazz movement),[56] Litweiler would now regret the tone of this, perhaps hastily penned, review. But Litweiler continues to make it difficult to appreciate his perspective with passages such as, "My fellow sourpusses are hereby warned that, like modern rock and 'sensitive' folk singers, this Sanders LP is probably extremely Meaningful and highly Significant."[57] Along with making such broad and even insulting generalizations about two types of music not under consideration in this review, Litweiler gives the impression that he is actually writing for his "fellow sourpusses," as opposed to a wider audience.

It is worth noting that in the next *Down Beat* issue, Litweiler was taken to task by Mike Bourne, who at the time was music editor of *Spectator*, and who is now known as Michael Bourne, a well-known jazz DJ on WBGO (a New Jersey jazz station that serves the tri-state area) since 1984. In the same issue, Robert D. Plone also criticizes Litweiler's review stating: "I have never seen so much smugness, insensitivity, and genuine bad judgment crammed into three paragraphs of criticism in all my days."[58]

Litweiler was consistent in his assessment of Sanders's work, however, as he also negatively reviewed Sanders's *Village of the Pharoahs* in a 1974 *Down Beat* review (though this time gave a 2 1/2 star rating): "From his compelling work with the last Coltrane groups Sanders has fallen to a point where many, including myself, have lost interest, and others even dismiss him as a mere popularizer."[59] It isn't clear who he is referring to with the latter statement (presumably other critics), but he continues to refer to Sanders's music as Coltrane-based, and states: "On this record Sanders has chosen an emotional trap for himself: he isn't, [and] never will be, Coltrane, so the hopeful element is that by returning totally, as here, to his source he may rediscover the creative love that was lost in his tenor playing."[60]

Litweiler's conflation of Sanders and Coltrane, so familiar in the literature I have examined, continues, as does the belittling of Sanders, and even Coltrane:

> The 3 extended solos continue the Coltrane style of *Worlds*, a style that copies Coltrane almost like one of those full-color Xeroxes. It is an exhausted Coltrane, too, for Sanders hasn't the emotional force to communicate his master's art. He offers the correct latter-day Coltrane phrasing and structure in excellently accurate detail. But there is utterly no sense of what Sanders' feelings are—except that the solos sound even more unfinished than Coltrane's own.[61]

It is clear that Litweiler appreciated some of what Sanders did with Coltrane, but basically dismisses his work subsequent to this to the point of outright dismissal and derision. Litweiler's comments provide ample evidence that Sanders, unfortunately, has

[56]John Litweiler, *Ornette Coleman: A Harmolodic Life* (New York: Morrow, 1993); *The Freedom Principle: Jazz After 1958* (New York: Da Capo, 1990).
[57]Litweiler, "Karma," 26.
[58]Mike Bourne, "'Karma' Uproar," *Down Beat*, October 1969, 9; Robert D. Plone, "'Karma' Uproar," *Down Beat*, October 1969, 9.
[59]John Litweiler, "Pharoah Sanders—*Village of the Pharoahs*," *Down Beat*, April 1974, 26.
[60]Ibid., 28.
[61]Ibid., 28.

been fighting an uphill battle with jazz critics whose tendency has been to assess his work (often unfavorably) in relation to Coltrane for most of his career.

In a 1972 review of *Thembi*, Bill Cole does more of the same.[62] Speaking of a portion of "Red, Black & Green," a tune he labels an "interesting track," he states: "The important thing about this section is that it sounds hauntingly like the things Pharoah and John Coltrane used to do together." He goes on to seemingly denigrate this quality in a kind of backhanded fashion, by saying, "There will never be another Coltrane. While he was with us he affected all of us with his religious dedication to the advancement of African-American music. He never looked back."[63]

In van der Mei's 1967 *Coda* article and interview, Sanders speaks of Coltrane's influence, but in terms of what it did for his overall creative ability as opposed to his saxophone playing:

> John has influenced me in my playing much longer than I've been playing with him, from much before. See, John is the kind of person who is trying to create something different all the time. … The way John and I play—it's different, we're both natural players and we have our own way of doing things … and to me it is like he is trying to make me aware of things by playing his horn. I know that playing with Coltrane has made me much broader in my understanding and my thinking. I might have been playing the same way, without playing with John, but sometimes I'm not opening up as much as I do when I'm playing with John.[64]

In another interview with Sanders published in 2002, Bob Bernotas asked what it was like playing with Coltrane, and Sanders's answer speaks to his own professionalism as well as his experience with Coltrane:

> Well, I'd go to the gig, and you'd never know what's gonna happen. John, sometimes he would call the key and that's all. And I'm wondering what I'm supposed to be doing. I'm listening and that's all I have left to do, is listen and try to play according to what was happening. But he was the sort of person, sort of musician, who didn't say very much, and I didn't say very much to him 'cause I was sort of a quiet person. And he'd just come to the bandstand and start playing, and everybody had to listen very, very carefully 'cause they didn't know what was happenin'. And we just went on from there. … I didn't really know that much about how he felt about me, what I was doing. I didn't know whether I was helping or was good or bad. I just kept on playing.[65]

I find the last statement telling and important, as this is what professionals do—they handle the gig. It doesn't necessarily mean they completely identify with the music, that it speaks to them necessarily, or that they have to even like it. In this case Sanders did, but ultimately it is a job and you do the best you can. This simple

[62]It should be noted the Cole himself was the author of a well known biography of Coltrane, and has been heavily invested in Coltrane's music. See Bill Cole, *John Coltrane* (New York: Schirmer, 1976). Cole also completed doctoral work in ethnomusicology at Wesleyan, where his dissertation focused on Coltrane.

[63]Bill Cole, "Caught in the Act: Pharoah Sanders, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Conn.," *Down Beat*, January 1971, 32.

[64]van der Mei, "Pharoah Sanders," 2.

[65]Bob Bernotas, *Reed All About It: Interviews and Master Classes with Jazz's Leading Reed Players* (New York: Boptism Music Publishing, 2002), 129–130.

concept of the demands of professional performance can be seen throughout Sanders's career, whether playing with Coltrane or, for example, on an R&B-oriented album. Sanders has always been open to adapting to numerous situations, and is quite clear that his main focus has always been to be himself, no matter what the situation. There is a pragmatism about his approach that is common among many self-identified jazz musicians, and it is almost a necessity for most considering the realities of financial and business concerns among jazz performers.

As alluded to earlier, Amiri Baraka provides some different perspectives on Sanders. Baraka was an African American writer with strong aesthetic and political opinions at a time when there were few black, and particularly radical black, voices in music criticism. He was unapologetically outspoken and prolific, so one is bound to appreciate some commentaries and not others, and this is true for how I perceive his discussions of Sanders. Certainly, however, his was a crucial intellectual and creative voice and also provided a clear and necessary alternative to white jazz critics in his books and essays as well as in his reviews in numerous music publications, including *Down Beat*.[66]

Baraka regularly discussed the music of black musicians, including the avant-garde or free jazz, as an expression of blackness, as well as spirituality, and in fact was a leading voice in this regard. This concept is actually much less radical than is at times portrayed in the critical literature surrounding Baraka's writings, and it articulates a crucially important discussion and movement that was present in the 1960s and that continues to be present in today's discussion on race and on race and music. Along the way, Baraka, as is true for other writers, offers great praise of Sanders while also being critical at times. He separates himself from most, however, as he is more enthusiastic in his admiration, but also because he contextualizes Sanders within the cultural and social movements of the period. Baraka's creation of a position for himself as an alternative to white critics is in evidence in a review of Sanders, "Apple Cores #5—The Burton Greene Affair," as he performed with Marion Brown (a close and influential colleague of Baraka) and the white pianist Burton Greene. Baraka praises Sanders and alto saxophonist Marion Brown while offering a very negative assessment of not only Greene, but of white critics in general who, in Baraka's estimation, have, and will continue to, react more positively to Greene: "The Burton Greene Affair, I have called it because Burton Greene is white, super-hip (MoDErN) pianist whose work is and will be praised and soon raised when [Dan] Morgenstern [a major white jazz critic, editor, publisher, and author] and Company become his Joshuas and the walls of the banks fall down."[67]

Baraka also wrote of the 1980s period of Sanders's performing and recording. In fact, other than the one review in *Down Beat*, Baraka's 2009 chapter, "Pharoah Sanders, *Shukuru,*" is the only direct discussion of *Live* that I have seen in print. Baraka singles out the five records on the Theresa label (including *Live* and *Shukuru*) during this period: "The whole general group of Theresa albums is at consistently awesome

[66]For an in-depth discussion of Baraka's work, see Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool*.
[67]Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), "Apple Cores #5—The Burton Greene Affair," in *Black Music* (New York: William Morrow, 1970, third printing), 137. First published in *Down Beat*, 1966.

levels (*Rejoice*, *Journey to the One*, *Live*, etc.)."[68] He also acknowledges this as a mature period: "The music is often a surge of emotional expression whose beauty is completed by the elaboration of Sanders's own development."[69] In this chapter Baraka is appreciative of Sanders's overall career and also contextualizes the saxophonist from a different perspective than many white critics. Baraka speaks of Sanders as a "reflection … of the popular revolutionary spirit of the day." He further notes: "[Sanders's] approach to the music has always been … serious and meaningful. Any serious analysis of his work will quickly confirm this. He has continued his innovations, both philosophically and technically, to sustain his demanding and powerful aesthetic. The sound of Sanders's horn is distinctive and completely his own." At the same time, however, he continues, as do others, to link Sanders with Coltrane: "His sonship to Trane is always acknowledged, which is now the artist honoring tradition and acknowledging beauty."[70]

In addition, Baraka, as was true with Kofsky, uses Sanders's music as a means to discuss his own opinions about the goals of music: "The whole musical persona of Pharoah Sanders is of a consciousness in conscious search of higher consciousness. So his Arkansas Blues was drawn to the high experimental school (Trane, Ornette, Ayler)."[71] The first sentence expresses a sentiment that Sanders speaks of as a clear goal of his music, while the second is a sentiment that he has reacted negatively to, as he regularly, and correctly so, asserts his voice as unique.

Interestingly, Baraka actually singles out the live performances at Sweet Basil that I addressed earlier:

> But as dazzling as these earlier works remain [referring to earlier Sanders recordings], like the greatest jazz artists, the most astonishing and emotionally transporting performances have been those club dates in which Pharoah, his band, the club atmosphere, and the audience have come together in something as close to a collective celebration of *life* itself as you are likely ever to get in on. Sweet Basil, in the last period, and always the Village Vanguard have been the usual venues, in NYC, where I have been party to these transmutations of energy into spirit.[72]

Unlike other critics of this period's work, Baraka highly praises the musicians Sanders was working with: "Sanders has consistently had bands that not only could create a lyrical near-mystical Afro-Eastern *world* but sweat hot fire music in continuing display of the so-called 'energy music' of the '60s. Plus, and this is its fundamental greatness, the music swang [*sic*] very very hard and was, yes, always extremely funky."[73]

Examining more contemporary critical perspectives on Sanders by others, although there aren't that many, confirms my initial impression that the late '70s and early '80s period tends to be ignored at this point by most critics. Phil Freeman, in his 2014

[68]Amiri Baraka, *Digging: The Afro-American Soul of American Classical Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 340.
[69]Ibid., 342.
[70]Ibid., 341.
[71]Ibid., 342.
[72]Ibid., 340. As an aside, in a conversation with Pharoah Sanders (personal communication, 8 April 2013), he regularly spoke extremely highly of New York City musicians and his love of playing in New York.
[73]Ibid., 341.

"primer" on Sanders's recorded output, essentially overlooks his early 1980s period.[74] Reviewing a May 2015 Sanders quartet performance in Brooklyn, Ben Ratliff, in a New York Times review of a live performance, expresses what I've noticed to be a frequent perception regarding Sanders: that he is rooted, and maybe even stuck, in the 1960s. At the same time, he effectively conveys Sanders's approach to music and performance: "He's a musician who represents more than the notes he plays; he stands for the late '60s, but also for a generous and open way of expressing and sharing music."[75] It is a positive review, but largely functions more as an homage to what Sanders stands for based on past performances rather than what he is now or what he has been since the late 1960s.

Russ Musto's 2014 review of Sanders, along with fellow saxophonists Odean Pope and James Carter in performance at the Blue Note in New York City, emphasizes the continued power of Sanders's work as contemporary music, while referencing material from both the late 1960s and early 1980s. He states that Sanders "blew relentlessly on … 'Freedom' ["You've got to Have Freedom" from *Live* and *Journey to the One*, both from the early 1980s] as his frontline mates fueled his incendiary improvisation with propulsive riffing. The three horns then joined forces to call it a night with Sanders' uplifting 'The Creator Has a Master Plan.'"[76] Along with this, it is interesting to note that Sanders's quartet presentations have not particularly evolved beyond the mature style displayed in *Live* and other records of that period. This is not a criticism, but rather an observation. In fact, I believe it is safe to say that many, if not most, musicians stay at a fairly steady level once having established a mature style.

Conclusion

With this article I have attempted to provide a more thorough context for the trajectory of Sanders's career as a professional player whose playing and bandleading, as well as his rather *ad hoc* approach to recording and audience development, evolved gradually, as is true for most musicians. His musicianship, as expressed in his work over the course of his career, is a culmination of many diverse experiences, drawing on the blues, R&B, avant-garde, and more mainstream, straight-ahead approaches, as well as fusions of various sorts that all coalesced into his mature style as a player, bandleader, and entertainer. This is all exemplified in his work in the early 1980s, as reflected on the album *Live*. Despite this, critics have tended to assess his music not within a broad context of professional and musical development, but in relation to a relatively brief engagement with the jazz avant-garde of the 1960s and early 1970s, especially as relating to his association with John Coltrane. Lost in these discussions are the realities of the professional marketplace, not to mention the aesthetic choices of artists whose approach is at odds with critical expectations.

[74]Phil Freeman, "The Primer: Pharoah Sanders," *The Wire*, September 2014, 42–49.
[75]Ben Ratliff, "Pharoah Sanders at Baby's All Right in Brooklyn," *New York Times*, 8 May 2015.
[76]Russ Musto, "New York at Night: Pharoah Sanders, Odean Pope, James Carter, Geri Allen, Reggie Workman, Jeff 'Tain' Watts," *New York City Jazz Record*, October 2014, 5.

Many, if not most, musicians take time to develop mature styles, and this has been the case with Sanders. *Live* finds him having found his voice and having brought together all of the techniques learned through a long career. Musicians generally also learn how to handle their careers as they go along and constantly make adjustments. For example, after Sanders had a hit with "Creator," he saw what it was like to play big concerts for lots of people and presumably liked it for both creative and economic reasons. Sanders was performing at mainstream clubs regularly and able to keep a touring band of top players. One way he did this was by creating a compelling show, and this doesn't happen by accident. Another thing Sanders did quickly was find a voice—a *sound*, along with developing signature musical elements. He used and developed this voice effectively and creatively through a remarkable number of situations and musical environments during his long career, giving us an early opportunity to see how the avant-garde and the straight-ahead can coexist, even in a variety of fusion (in the broad sense of the term) contexts.

As an audience member at Sweet Basil and other venues, I was entertained and thrilled by the Pharoah Sanders Quartet's performances during this period. It was a terrific band playing with a powerful commitment and non-stop energy that engaged and excited the audience every time they played. It took him years to get to this point; I am suggesting, and this should be the case for all musicians, that we look at the totality of Sanders's career and not preference one era or experience over another. Let's recognize him for the broad-based player and bandleader that he is, as well as for his beautiful spirit that consistently shines through in his performances.

Sanders's career and his critical reception also offer a cautionary tale regarding critical perspectives surrounding musicians' careers and an over-reliance upon the notion of rigid stylistic categories. There is still enough of a divide between avant-garde, straight-ahead, and fusion musics, at least in the opinion of some musicians, critics, and scholars, that bridging this gap, particularly over thirty years ago, is a significant and important accomplishment, and one that, along with the work of many other musicians has brought us to a place where the divide is much smaller than it was. Many players now do this routinely—you almost have to have this skill set now—and the career of Pharoah Sanders has provided a useful model for how to bridge these so-called divides while maintaining a strong, clear, and highly personal and expressive musical identity.

Abstract

In this article I examine the career of Pharoah Sanders through two streams. I first trace the path of Sanders's career through recordings and performances in a variety of settings with various musical approaches. Specifically, I examine his evolution from John Coltrane's *Meditations* (1965), through *Karma* (1969) and Sanders's hit, "The Creator Has a Master Plan," *Thembi* (1971), *Love Will Find a Way* (1977), and eventually to *Live* (1981). I posit that *Live* represents Sanders's mature style that successfully combines avant-garde techniques and a more mainstream approach. I then examine

Sanders's reception through the critical literature to more fully contextualize his career. Several things become evident in this regard. First, this period (the early 1980s) is frequently overlooked in the literature on Sanders, and when it is discussed it is frequently misunderstood in terms of its relationship to his career as a whole. Along with this, critical reception tends to focus on Sanders's work of the 1960s. Second, I posit that Sanders has had a complicated and limited reception because he does not fit neatly into established categories such as straight-ahead, mainstream, and avant-garde or free jazz. Further, I posit that perpetuating these artificial boundaries is detrimental to the music and to musicians such as Sanders who do not fit into one neat category, as well as to the larger world of the arts, scholarship, and well beyond.