

APPENDICE

DOCUMENTO N° 1

Copia della partitura originale di *Stolen Moments*, pubblicata in: *Down Beat*, 29/4 (1962), pp.42-48

### TENOR SAX

$\text{♩} = 104$


**A** *mp* *Soli*, *No Vib*

*mp Cresc Poco A Poco* *mf*

*Forte Dim* *Soli*

(Trumpet Solo) 24 Bars

*Dm7 Dmib 2. Cm7 Cmib Dm7 Dmib E7 A7 Dm7 Dmib*

After ALL Solos, Return to The top, Play Letter **A** Twice. On The Repeat, Jump From The Symbol  To The Coda.

**Coda** *mf* *No Vib* (Rit) *mp* *mf* *mf*

OLIVER E. NELSON  
A 1196  
LOCAL 802  
R.C. 1552 7900 N.

### BARITONE SAX


$\text{♩} = 104$

**A** *mf* *Soli*, *No Vib*

*mp Cresc Poco A Poco* *mf*

*Forte Dim* *push.* *Soli*

(Trumpet, Tenor + Piano Solos)

After ALL Solos, Return to The top, Play Letter **A** Twice. On The Repeat, Jump From The Symbol  To The Coda.

**Coda** *mf* *No Vib* (Rit) *mp* *mf* *mf* *mf*

OLIVER E. NELSON  
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## DOCUMENTO N° 2

Recensione del 1989 apparsa su Down Beat in occasione della ristampa di *The Blues and The Abstract Truth*

*The romantics say art must be imperfect to be human. Oliver Nelson proved them wrong. There isn't a false or hesitant note anywhere here, but bloodless it ain't. A thousand replays later, the contrast between saxophonists is still magic: Dophy's notes leap from his horn like a pagan cry; Nelson's solos (and tunes—"Cascades") unfold in orderly patterns based on homemade exercises, but don't sound studied. Freddie Hubbard has never been better; Haynes and P.C. goosed Bill Evans (who still got Kind of Bluesy on "Yearnin").*

*Every composition is built on 12-bar blues or the 32-bars of "I Got Rhythm"—the dual forms from which so many have abstracted so much beauty and truth. But Nelson tinkered with and tested those forms, devising 44- and 56-bar choruses. Eric, on his third fine Nelson LP, seized the possibilities in these sleek lines and bracing*

*voicings ("Teenie's Blues") most readily; he energized the sextet as much as the timeless charts did. You can't envision the date without Dophy—which may be why these outstanding tunes aren't covered nearly enough. It's one of Eric's prime bequests. And Nelson's masterpiece. He made a nominal sequel, but nothing he did later came close.*

*Back when Art Lange edited db, he once sent reviewers a tactful memo, reminding them that the greatest records ever made could get only five stars—and to keep that in mind when ever tempted to bestow the big handful. For this reviewer, B&TAT is one of the benchmarks to measure other albums against. Few measure up. (MCA/Impulse 5659)*

Kevin Whilehea, *Blues and the Abstract Truth*, in:Down Beat, 56/9 (Settembre 1989), pp. 71-72

## DOCUMENTO N°3

Copia della partitura originale di *Blues& The Abstract Truth*, pubblicata in Down Beat Music '69, 14 (1969), pp. 82-87



## DOCUMENTO n°4

Recensione di Dan Morgenstern per *More Blues& The Abstract Truth*

Rating: \*\*\*\*\*

*On the heels of some rather commercial efforts, this superior album once again does justice to Nelson's great gifts. He does not play on this record, but it bears the stamp of his musical personality as arranger and conductor. Though the lineup never exceeds eight pieces, Nelson's writing is so skillful that the over-all effect is that of a much bigger ensemble. This is accomplished without the aid of cheap engineering tricks; the trick, if any, is in the scoring. Nor does the big-band texture of the music cause any loss of the relaxed spontaneity made possible by the intimacy of a small group. Nelson gets the best from both possible worlds, and his arrangements and backgrounds really make the soloists play. As the title indicates, this is a blues album. Yet there are no two tracks in the same mood or mold. The three Nelson originals range from the modal modernity of the title track through the bouncy Twist flavor of Critics' to the minor but Basieish hues of Bob. The canonic interplay between brass and reeds in the opening and closing passages of Abstract are fresh, delightful and wholly original, while Critics' shows how elements of rock and roll can be used as musically valid jazz ingredients without satire or irony. The Mingus-like Gospel feeling of Theme (one of two attractive Dave Brubeck compositions inspired by the Mr. Broadway TV series played on this LP) is also handled by Nelson without tongue-in-cheek frivolity. The result is music with real gaiety—not a self-conscious pastiche. The Brubeck Blues for Mr. Broadway, a cross between ballad and pure blues, generates a nostalgic mood, while Nelson's version of Neal Hefti's well-known Midnight (from the Basie book) is warmly romantic in feeling. Both these tracks are enhanced by the presence of Webster. The old master's long solo on Blues is a masterpiece that surely will take its place among his best recorded efforts. (That fifth star in the rating is for Ben.)*

*Mighty, based on a riff tune by Johnny Hodges, is a relaxed performance. Nelson reworks the Jimmy Rushing-Basie Chicago in a way that effectively retains the mood of the classic Basie band without seeming in the least like a copy. While Webster is peerless, the other soloists also turn in sterling performances. Woods is much in evidence; all his solos are remarkably well-structured statements, played with the assurance and control of a master instrumentalist, yet retaining the fire and convictions of his early work. His spot on Mighty is outstanding. Thad Jones is in rare form. His beautiful a cappella introduction to the Brubeck Blues is a gem; his solo on the same track, following Webster's, is good enough not to seem like a letdown. His clear, ringing sound has rarely been captured better on record. Pianist Kellaway is noteworthy in all his roles: as a sparkling, consistently swinging and inventive soloist, as pacesetter and accompanist. He also plays excellent fills, notably on Midnight. His solo on Mighty, building to a Garneresque climax, is invigorating, and his contribution to Critics' is a prime example of modern barrelhouse piano. Kellaway is surprisingly flexible for so young a musician but avoids the depersonalizing pitfalls of that attribute. He is always himself. Adams makes his presence felt with some driving, rip-roaring work, notably on Theme and Mighty. His sound still has that characteristic dryness, but it has grown in volume and in ease of projection. That he can also be relaxed is demonstrated on Bob, and his ensemble work throughout is excellent. Bodner's English horn ensemble-lead on Blues adds a pretty color to the band's tonal palette. Bassist Davis is a remarkable musician. His only solo is a brief introduction to Chicago, but his section work is unmistakable (he is especially exciting behind Kellaway's solos). What Davis plays adds to each soloist's performance; it never attracts attention for selfish reasons. Tate is rapidly becoming one of the best all-round drummers on the New York scene. He has a supple, swinging beat, good taste, superior*

*craftsmanship, and excellent ears, and he knows what the situation requires—be it trio or big-band work, he plays for the group.*

*All told, this is a most rewarding and appealing record, put together with thought, skill, and care and reflecting credit en all participants. It is also a sterling example of contemporary jazz-making, informed and aware of the best values of the jazz tradition. Not much abstraction here but a good deal of ageless truth.*

Dan Morgenstern, *Oliver Nelson - "More Blues and the Abstract Truth"* (Impulse), in *Down Beat*, 32/9 (22 Aprile 1965) p.34,36.

## DOCUMENTO N°5

### THE STATE OF JAZZ EDUCATION

*an interview with Oliver Nelson by Charles M. Weisenberg*

*OLIVER NELSON—composer-arranger and saxophonist—is one of the increasing number of top professionals who have involved themselves in the proliferating jazz education movement.*

*Nelson has been teaching, consulting and conducting on college campuses for some five years. He brings to these tasks both a thorough academic background and years of practical experience as a writer and a player. While he has found the work gratifying and stimulating, he is also seriously concerned about the future of jazz education in the U.S.*

*"The jazz education movement, it must be recognized, is still in its infant stages. As a movement it isn't really enough, not nearly enough," Nelson says. "Most of the activity occurs only from May to August. A lot more in the way of education is needed if this American music is to continue to grow."*

*Nelson views the stage band and jazz clinic movement as a valuable thing, but is far from satisfied with what is being done. If the movement does not begin to grow in several ways, he will probably wind up being disappointed and perhaps even disenchanted. Nelson's prime concerns include the need for a better understanding of the place jazz should have in the music world, the need for year-round jazz education programs, greater involvement of young black musicians in the movement, and a better understanding of jazz history.*

*A growing number of scoring assignments for television, combined with the opportunity for motion picture work, led Nelson to settle with his family in Los Angeles in 1967. His reputation as a conductor, arranger and composer is growing with increasing speed. And as Nelson's earning capacity climbs, it becomes less and less practical for him to take time out from his busy schedule to teach.*

*"I do it because I love to be involved with this movement," Nelson explains. On more than one occasion, he said, it has actually cost him money to do a clinic, but he doesn't regret it.*

*"I would love to be a composer or artist in residence at some university. I really couldn't afford to stop what I am doing and go away to teach for a year, but I might find a way to do it if I thought a university would be interested. Of course I'd have to have a lot of freedom to do what I want to do."*

*A few years ago, Nelson returned to his alma mater, Washington University in St. Louis, to teach a six-week jazz class. It was the first time the school had done anything like this, and there was quite a bit of apprehension. "The people were a little surprised that everything went so smoothly," Nelson commented.*

*On the subject of "stage bands", Nelson says he doesn't know where the name came from and doesn't really know what it means. In saying this, he is aiming an indirect barb at those who hesitate to use the term jazz. He sees this fear as an indication that many music educators and college administrators still think of jazz as "some kind of dirty linen."*

"I suppose the stage band is really just a popular dance band. They eliminated the word jazz in order to find something suitable to call it," says Nelson. "Even when jazz is involved in a study program, the schools often downgrade it by offering fewer credits and by offering the classes at odd hours."

One of the most important things that a clinic or college band festival can do, according to Nelson, is to stimulate both students and teachers to push for jazz education on a year-round basis. He is quick to point out that a weekend, a week or even six weeks are hardly enough to prepare a young musician to become a creative jazz artist. It is only sufficient to open the door so that the students can see the potentials, but only a few of the more talented ones will be able to go far enough on their own to achieve significant goals, he thinks.

Nelson's campus visits have convinced him that there are two major reasons for the lack of good educational opportunities in jazz throughout the year. The first is the attitude of the educators towards the music, and the second is the inadequacy of too many of the music teachers.

"We were at one eastern university for a week. We had all of their facilities, including rehearsal rooms, tape recorders for the kids to hear themselves, and record players for albums we wanted them to hear. We had everything, but I didn't see one member of the music department. As soon as it was turned over to jazz, everybody evacuated the place. They should have been there to find out what was going on so they could deal with their students after we left," Nelson says.

In West Virginia, one school sent a man who plays casual weekend jobs to the airport to pick up visiting instructor Nelson. "I guess they felt he could communicate with me better. None of the music instructors came. Perhaps they felt that if they'd sent the guy who teaches vocal music, for example, we wouldn't have been able to talk."

These provincial snobs would have blushed, no doubt, if they had been told that Nelson is also a respected "classical" composer. His works in this realm include a woodwind quintet, a song cycle for contralto and piano, *Dirge for Chamber Orchestra*, and *Soimdpiece for String Quartet and Contralto*.

When Nelson speaks of music teachers, he points out that while his conservatory training gives him a background comparable to theirs, the teachers do not have a jazz background comparable to his. He is anxious to find ways to reach out to music teachers as well as the students. Too many of these teachers, Nelson says, do not see the difference between creative jazz and commercial music. Little wonder, then, that they are not able to provide the kind of education that is needed. His campus visits have led him to believe that the level of musicianship among teachers is not high enough.

"I know a woodwind instructor who cannot play in time, and yet he is teaching .improvisation," Nelson recalled. "This is terrible, because I can see how he can lead so many kids in the wrong direction." Nelson says that while many students can learn to play their instruments in high school, they must get their polish in college. "As a result of all this, the training is adequate for hotel orchestras or small combos," Nelson says.

Nelson doesn't have a solution to offer for year-round jazz education, but he is hopeful that the summer clinics will stimulate enough people to recognize the value of creative jazz so that the basic problems will be attacked and solved. He sees hope in places like Indiana University, the University of Illinois, and North Texas State. Although these schools represent a move in the right direction, it is not enough to satisfy the 35-year-old composer-arranger.

One outgrowth of Nelson's repeated experience of having to work with students who could not improvise was the writing of a saxophone study book, *Patterns for Saxophone*, which Nelson prints and distributes himself.

"The book had to be written because there was no way in the world to teach these kids

about what I had come to teach," he says. "Everybody is starting to write books these days, but I find that they lean very heavily on classical techniques. I guess that's all right, but it's up to somebody like me to break out of that."

Musicianship isn't the only educational lack Nelson has found on the college campuses. He also discovered a big gap in the knowledge of jazz history. Very little is known about such important people as James P. Johnson, Jelly Roll Morton, Sidney Bechet, or Meade Lux Lewis. A lot of important

jazz is not popular today. Nelson has had to explain this to his own son as well as to his students. The problem is the absence of jazz history courses from the regular school curricula as well as from the jazz clinics. Jazz history, he feels, should be a part of all clinics, but time rarely permits that luxury.

Nelson would prefer to discuss jazz as a musical art or to talk about such things as a commercial music, film writing and television writing. He is reluctant to apply white or black labels to music. But as he delves into his own attitudes and opinions of stage bands and clinics, Nelson finds it impossible not to take up social and racial problems.

"One of the things that has disturbed me since I began going to these clinics and festivals is that very few Negroes participate, either with mixed groups or with all-Negro groups. You find almost no big Negro bands, and very few of the individual soloists that do show up are outstanding. I started to ask myself why this is and what is going on," Nelson says.

One of the answers he has come up with is that black educators still look upon jazz as something soiled. There is not much difference here between them and their white colleagues. Nelson suggests that because many of the Negro schools have a religious basis they concentrate on vocal and choral music. Not only is there no jazz, except what is played underground, but there is very little chamber music. Nelson pointed to Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Mo., as an example:

"The head of the music department, Dr. Fuller, had the kind of attitude I'm talking about. He is a Negro, educated at Iowa State University, has a Ph. D. His attitude about jazz was that it was not to be played in the Fine Arts Building. If he happened to be walking through the building and heard something that even remotely sounded like jazz, he would open the door and say, 'We'll have none of that.'

"I'm aware now that I can't say that the reason why there are so few Negro college groups is because of white prejudice, because that's not so. It's black prejudice. It's the fact that the black schools have no use for this music, and therefore would not dare to start a fund-raising campaign to send a jazz group to compete in one of the college festivals. The schools have got to say, 'We are going to send our band just like the football team, and we want them to win!'"

Most of the young music students Nelson has met in the past five years apparently come from white middle-class families that can afford good

instruments and good lessons. He finds that these students bring first-rate equipment with them, which is an important starting point. They also know how to phrase, can make a clean attack and can play with other musicians. But while many of the white students have a fair amount of technical ability, they do not seem to be able to improvise.

The problem among many white students, as Nelson sees it, is that they are emulating their white instructors. The young musicians are excited by the modern jazz to which they are listening, but their instructors are not teaching them the things they want to play.

"I find that too many of the white students have enough technical ability so that you can tell them what to do and they can do it, but they are not as able to let their emotions come out. Once in a while, a Negro student will show up who has no discipline, but turn him loose with five or six choruses on Cherokee and you'll hear something."

Aside from the Negroes who are attending black schools where jazz is not recognized,

*Nelson is aware of another group in the ghettos who can't even go to college and are completely out of the reach of most clinics and stage band festivals. Nelson is currently involved in one attempt to reach some of these underprivileged youngsters in a section of Los Angeles, but is worried that the effort will simply not be enough.*

*Nelson complained about inadequate financing of jazz clinics and stage band programs, which makes it difficult to consistently get the best jazzmen as instructors. Money is needed to improve the publicity surrounding these events, so that the entire community can become involved. Nelson sees the jazz performer as needing a good audience with which he can interact. Additional funds would also help to set up tougher standards, so that every kid who applies is not automatically admitted. Finally, more money could provide longer planning periods to assure better programs.*

*Nelson doesn't know where that money is going to come from, but he feels it would be available if enough people realized how important these programs really are. He warned against becoming too self-satisfied with the progress that has been made in this area, because so much still needs to be done.*

*Despite some of his critical views, when Nelson was asked to sum up his attitudes toward the jazz clinics and the stage band movement, the first word he came up with was "exciting."*

*He finds it exciting to see the look of discovery on the face of a young musician as he begins to see more 'clearly into this thing called jazz. "When I see someone frowning and looking up at the ceiling I can almost see the doors opening. That's exciting," Nelson says.*

*"It is a great thrill to hear 16 or 17 kids that sounded plain rotten on the first day actually sound good at the end of the fifth day. Sometimes they are so enthused that they have even asked me if they should go out on the road."*

*Nelson expects to continue to find the time to participate in educational work for many reasons. He obviously likes to help young musicians to find their way into the jazz world. He feels a responsibility to the music as well as to the students. He is still young enough to remember his own problems in gaining experience and insight, and he also finds that interaction with the students helps him learn more about himself and his music.*

*It is fortunate for the students attending clinics and festivals that they are able to study under such gifted and dedicated professionals as Oliver Nelson.*

Charles M. Weisenberg, *The State of Jazz Education. An Interview with Oliver Nelson*, in: *Down Beat*, 35/19 (19.Sep.1968), p. 16-17, 38.

## DOCUMENTO N°6

Intervista di Leonard Feather a Oliver Nelson al ritorno del tour in Africa

*Toting a saxophone and a septet across hottest Africa is a task seldom sought out by American jazzmen, and just as rarely assigned. During eight weeks of trekking through eight West and Central African countries under the aegis of the United States State Department, Oliver Nelson learned as much as he taught. The teaching was subliminal; his combo played concerts at which most of the music was highly sophisticated by African and even Afro-American standards. The learning was mainly a realization of social and psychological gaps.*

*"A lot of us were thinking of Africa as a way to go back to our roots, to a homeland," said Nelson, "but we felt strange. They would say 'Parlez-vous francais?' and when we told them our French wasn't that good, they'd say. 'Oh! Americans!' We met Negroes in the Peace Corps who had gone to Africa to find themselves, but they couldn't identify the way they'd expected to. They found a culture so different and so unchanging that they realized it was impossible to become a part of the African community."*



The French-speaking countries on the itinerary, all of them independent since 1960, were the Central African Republic, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Upper Volta, Mali and Senegal. An exception was Gambia, the former British colony which tweaked the lion's tail for the final and decisive time in 1965. The band played for three distinct kinds of groups. "We did concerts for the All-African elite, usually Catholic, often missionaries who got into government—the ones who have control of media such as radio and newspapers. They limited their enthusiasm to compliments after the show. 'Oh, it was formidable, fantastic!' they'd say, but with reserve. It was very different when we'd play for students. Every time we got through, we were just about mobbed. They'd rush on the bandstand, knock over saxophones and plead for autographs and our addresses. Writing out addresses became so tiring we finally had 10,000 cards printed at our own expense."

In a third category were free concerts for the man off the street, the type not advanced enough to understand anything but high life or traditional music. "These people are supposed to be completely *UL*-educated, but they may speak a dozen African dialects. They responded, just like the students—applause, not just at the end of the tune, but during high points of the solos." For these audiences, Nelson changed the program a little. Aware that the flute is pervasively important in Africa, he let saxophonist Ernie Watts loose on an extended flute solo. "Ernie got in every lick that he felt would reach them, and he never missed."

Reactions differed little from country to country. "There was one upset in Buea, a British-language town in normally French-speaking Cameroon, and do you know how the people in Buea acted? Just like the English people! We were seventy-five percent of the way through the concert before they responded to anything. After the show an announcement was made that the concert was over, and the audience meekly formed a line, just like the British, to file out in an orderly way. Yes, we bombed in Buea, but consider this: we did about fifty concerts, workshops or jam sessions during thirty-six working days, so you could say the tour was ninety-eight percent successful."

Knowledge of American jazz is minimal. Even the students, if they had heard of Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong, knew nothing of Charlie Parker or Lester Young. "Their conception of jazz, unfortunately, is James Brown and Otis Redding. Our music came as a surprise. "For the first three weeks we spent all our spare time in nightclubs. Everything we heard was utterly alien to the ethnic music we expected. It wasn't authentic African and it wasn't jazz. In all those thousands of miles we didn't hear a single outstanding jazz musician. A couple of electric guitars here, a fender bass there. Finally we got to Dakar, Senegal, on the extreme western tip of the continent, which was very much like Oceanside, California, or San Diego. Dakar was the most advanced of all the cities—musically, too. We heard a cornetist who played in a strictly modal style, reminiscent of John Coltrane."

Nelson says he "never felt a draft" despite anti-American news slanting which he sensed on some of the local radio stations. Africans who heard one side of the story through this medium and a different version from the Voice of America were confused. Their vision of the United States was reflected in their certainty that all the American musicians' instruments were solid gold; Nelson had difficulty convincing anyone they were made of brass. By the same token, they wondered how a country so rich could be in so much turmoil. "It's not true that they don't give a damn," says Nelson. "They're very concerned with the black revolution, and they all manage to keep in touch, because even people who have no electricity can afford a tiny transistor radio. To my amazement, I would see the words 'Black Power' scraped in charcoal on a mud hut. But poverty is everywhere, and I foresee neither a social nor a musical revolution. There will be no significant jazz player coming out of Africa. I'm arranging for American record

companies to put some African radio stations on their mailing lists, to send them LPs of men like Freddie Hubbard and Herbie Hancock so they'll feel a little more in touch." Racial attitudes colored the response to Nelson's musicians. "Our trumpeter, Freddie Hill, would get a lot of applause before he even started to play, because he was black, the darkest member of the group. On the other hand, if they liked John Klemmer's saxophone solos, they would react just as warmly afterward, even though he's white." Frank Strozier, the blond, blue-eyed saxophonist who claims some African ancestry, was the subject of much "Is he or isn't he?" probing. "Frank and I both got sick and tired of the constant questioning. I would say 'What does it matter if we're three whites and four Negroes or any other ratio. The guy's a great musician.' I'd tell them the blues is an American art form that derived from the shores of Africa, and that Frank was going to interpret the story of a journey, *Goin' to Chicago*. He got a standing ovation every time; in the final analysis the feeling he transmitted was all that mattered."

Ouagadougou, Upper Volta, was the scene of the tour's only TV appearance. "They had three cameras and several capable African technicians, some of them trained at RCA in New York, but with those 5,000 watt lamps and no air conditioning we were about to perish." Nelson feels that despite the presence of a minority of whites who hate Africa and the Africans, almost everyone he met in the Peace Corps or the Foreign Service had an enlightened attitude, including white as well as black United States ambassadors. He told one story that illustrated as much as any the impact of the musicians as goodwill envoys. "When we arrived in Ft. Lamy, Chad, Ambassador Sheldon B. Vance said: 'We're hoping for a miracle.' I told him we'd do all we could, but he said, 'No, not from you. The president of the country is coming tonight. He's been annoyed lately to find that when he gets to an official function, half his ministers are absent. So there's a new drive on: 'everybody must be there before I arrive.' " At the concert the turnout was just what the ambassador had hoped for. After the first set, the president of Chad asked to have his picture taken with me and the band. Ambassador Vance told us later, 'I think the door is now partly open, because of what you did .' He told us how happy he was that we would come to his little country and make his job a bit easier. "If that's what music can do as the universal language, our mission was accomplished. Still what I remember best is those music-hungry people roaring for another encore. It was a tough trip, but I've been asked by the State Department if I'd like to go back some day, and you know what? I'd be happy to rough it again." MAY 1969

Leonard Feather, *The Pleasure of Jazz*, Horizon, Londra 1976, pp.187-190

#### DOCUMENTO N° 7

Intervista di Paula Rivelli a Oliver Nelson al ritorno del tour in Africa

*The Oliver Nelson septet left the United States for Africa on a State Department tour March 3rd, 1969: They returned May 1. The septet consisted of Nelson, soprano sax; Stan Gilbert, bass; Bob Morin, drums; Ernie Watts, baritone sax; John Klemmer, tenor sax; Frank Strozier, alto sax and Freddie Hill, trumpet.*

*The following interview took place June 2nd, 1969 while Oliver was in New York City negotiating with Sam Goldwyn, Jr. to write the film score for Cotton Comes To Harlem. Directed by Ossie Davis, the flick is scheduled for release in November.*

**Pauline:** Readers are familiar with the name Oliver Nelson. We have run several articles about you since we've been publishing, and readers are well aware of your victories as

arranger and composer in our various critics and readers polls. So let's get right to the moment and talk about your State Department tour in Africa. Generally, how did audiences react to you and your music?

**Oliver:** Generally, the audiences came as sort of a surprise, because we were told, first of all, that we wouldn't be able to reach the Africans because we obviously had never reached any Americans. The State Department, being generally what a State Department is, said the music would not be accepted, it was too sophisticated even for an American audience. That's the general statement that was made concerning the music in Washington, D.C., at Charlie Byrd's, and at some point, I was advised to change the programming to accommodate what the Africans really wanted to hear, and they said, "Play a little high-life music," which is alien to American culture, and, "Try to get your white drummer to really get some solos together so he can beat up all his drums, because, of course, the drum is a thing with the Africans."

Now, I listened to all of that and properly decided to forget all about it, and I decided that when we went to Africa we would play the music that we play. The surprising thing is that the Africans responded to the music from an emotional point of view, not intellectually. And I can say, now that the tour is over, that the State Department has said that it was so successful that they are projecting a tour in 1970 of Eastern Europe, if we can work out the details of the trip.

So generally, African audiences responded differently from what we thought. Which is the students, after a performance, would rush up and almost knock all the horns off the bandstand. We had Africans that you meet, people who run the government in these countries, they responded by having pictures taken with us. The Russians and the Red Chinese are very, very entrenched in Africa, in Mali and in Guinea. So our trip was really a musical presentation, but somehow we got involved in politics whether we liked it or not.

**Pauline:** In what way, Oliver?

**Oliver:** Well, we ended up defending the American way of life, whatever it is that we have here in this country, whatever the problems are that don't seem to be so great when you are in a country where poverty is a way of life.

**Pauline:** Getting back to the music, you mentioned in a recent phone call from the coast that African music has rhythm but no melody. Will you elucidate?

**Oliver:** Well, African music has always been rhythmic. It has always been functional, also. They have what you would call a ritual, in places like Upper Volta; this ritual is enacted, oh, I don't know, once every two weeks and the music that accompanies this is usually music for dancing—a processional, or something where the music plays a functional role.

Now, Africans don't have harmony as we know it. They don't hear music vertically, like we do, in the case of, say, Mozart. They do achieve harmony because several players will be playing something completely different from each other: four players, each playing a different part. They get harmony this way, and you get it as a direct result of the counterpoint, you know. Linear fashion. So harmony doesn't exist as we know it, but rhythmically, the African music is intact; Now you see, the music is alien. Most of the music I heard in Africa was alien. It was either completely European-influenced, or harmonically organized. The very fact that the drums are still intact indicates that there has been some resistance on the part of the Africans, maybe unconscious, for the drums have always remained intact, even though the melody sounds like Hymn Number 99. The African hasn't developed his own thing. The African is very busy trying to become as Western as possible because to think Western means to have a car, electricity, a job, to take a vacation, to go to France. And when he sings, he is singing a song about a specific thing, like I remember one story, it was in Upper Volta and the story was about this girl who came to live with him and she came in and ate up all the food and once the

food was gone, she left. Well, that's functional music. Very functional. It's not, you know, a melody that the guy just wrote down. It's probably been handed down for a long, long time. The very fact that Africa has produced no' significant jazz musicians makes me wonder. This is very strange, because in eight French-speaking countries in West Africa, eight major cities, with a population sometimes a million, two hundred thousand would be the smallest—we would invite all the major musicians in all these cities, with an invitation from the U.S. Embassy, United States Information Service, to tell these people that we want an exchange of cultures. And they said, "Well, okay, let's conduct workshops where we would have all the musicians together." Well, we found when they tried to play the American blues form, the twelve-bar, they didn't know when to change from the I chord to the IV chord. And I couldn't understand it because all the faces were black, and I said, "Well, you know, if they have black faces, then why the hell can't they play the blues?" That confused me, because then it occurred to me because maybe they can't play the blues because they don't understand the emotional experience . connected with whatever it was that happened in this country' My expression at that point was, "Thank God for slavery, because if we hadn't had slavery, we wouldn't have had the music." This brings up another point, too, and I wonder about it because, of course, the government is very concerned about what I have to say, now that I am back.

But when you have a country, any country in West Africa, that has only one radio and only one newspaper, and then the music that you hear on the radio is always slanted towards popular music, you wonder how can there ever be a social revolution when everybody is dancing in the street, and then you look around and you see that everybody is completely poor, nobody has anything.

And I wonder if this means that if you have a society that has absolutely nothing, do you keep them happy by giving them what they think they want, and that is music that they can dance to, not music that would cause them to even think for a minute of social change?

You see, everything grows in Africa. That is one of the things that amazes most people. A person doesn't have to have a job in order to survive there because they have mango trees and all they have to do is reach up and knock it off. They have bananas, the rivers are full of fish. You see, all these things have a direct bearing on everything that's happening in Africa, and I say myself, if you turn on the radio and all you hear is popular music and political speeches, you know, saying that we have a great president and look what he is doing and all the rest. James Brown is very important in Africa, and Otis Redding. But why are they important? This is what I am saying, if the government controls the radio, then they feed the people what they want them to have in terms of culture, and what social change does happen is happening on a very basic level.

For instance, midwifery—they are trying to keep as many children as possible from dying at birth. But we're talking about something very basic now. We are talking about life in its beginning, and if that is a major problem in Africa and if measles is a problem in Africa and smallpox is a problem there and if the life expectancy is up to 35 now, you know, what we are talking about? We are talking about a continent that is very hostile in many ways.

In the desert areas the temperature sometimes exceeds 120 degrees, with no humidity. You go out and because you're thinking you're black and can take it you go out and fall right in the middle of the street. Absolutely—it's happened to me. I thought I could stand it because I have a black face. But they called me a *matisse* which means a person of mixed blood.

**Pauline:** Going back to what you said before: our ghettos do not have mango trees and streams full of fish, and music, although it is a salvation in some cases, does not pay the rent. And then, on the other hand, where we're pushing black history as part of our

academic curriculum and what have you, where do you see the salvation for the American blacks?

**Oliver:** Well, this is one thing that I guess I feel very strongly about because the whole trip in Africa—can I name the countries?

**Pauline:** Please.

**Oliver:** Cameroon, East and West Cameroon, which is a coastal city. The Ivory Coast. Abidjan—we had a stop in Dahomey, where a great number of slaves came from. Central African Republic, which was Bongi, capital city, on the Ubangi River and I have something to say about that, too. And then Republic of Chad, Republic of Niger, the Republic of Upper Volta, the Republic of Gambia and the Republic of Senegal and I must have left something out.

We were even in Nigeria for a very short time, long enough to see how a British or an English-speaking country reacts to a situation which was a hundred and some miles away, Biafra. When we were there, the planes were coming over, the bombers, the fighter planes, and there were helicopters, soldiers with guns and we felt like we were in a military situation—you know, "Where is your identity card?" The whole thing.

And a man did come over and ask us something' but the minute we started to speak, he knew we were not Nigerians. And it was explained to us—one guy who had courage, I would say, asked, "Well, why are you doing this horrible thing in Biafra, all the children starving?" and the guy made it very clear. He said, "How would you have it if, in your country, Detroit decided it wanted to move out of the United States because it discovered gold and platinum, titanium or anything else?" He said, "We cannot have a runaway province in our own country and we don't have to fire a shot. We simply will work it out, you know, we want to work it out. And the Red Cross and the American government interfere, they don't understand our ways." And he is saying, first of all, that it is perfectly logical to starve your enemy to death, no matter if they're women, children or what, because it's a sensible way. It's a way that works. If you don't understand it, then you really don't understand African ways.

And, of course, we couldn't understand it; you've seen the pictures and everything else, so you know. But what he was saying is that they cannot have a runaway province within their own boundaries. And they achieve results any way they can. We can't begin to think of this. Recap. Whatever it is that Africa is, and the reasons why I wanted to go—I'll see if I can make it clear now, the differences. Now, first of all, West Africa is essentially French-speaking, and East Africa is English-speaking, also Portuguese—a lot of people have colonized Africa; what you see, when you go there, is a continent which has been colonized, never enslaved.

Slavery was a big thing, for instance in Bongi, Central African Republic, right on the Ubangi River. I saw a photograph of a Ubangi woman—one of the two or three remaining women from the Ubangi tribe with the wooden blocks in their mouths; you know a lot of people have the notion that this was done because it was considered a beautification thing. TSut it was really intended to discourage the Arabs from taking the women and selling them as slaves. So what they did was put the blocks into the women's mouths and disfigure them any way they could. Now that slavery no longer exists in this part of Africa, there is no longer the need to disfigure the women, because the slave trade has stopped.

I am saying, you understand now the necessity for the Ubangi tribe to preserve their tribe by disfiguring—and Americans can't begin to understand the reasons why.

Whatever revolution it takes will have to happen on such a basic level. Wigs are being worn now in Africa. Kids want to play electric guitars and not play traditional music. People want to live in the city and don't want to live in the villages anymore. Whatever the social and revolutionary change in Africa, it will take quite a long time, as opposed to the

kind of social and revolutionary change that we have here.

So Africa has simply not produced any music other than traditional that can be considered even close to American jazz in any kind of way.

**Pauline:** Or American pop, for that matter?

**Oliver:** Well, they get pop music from France and West Africa. It's almost like this—if you want to hear the news in Africa and you happen to have a short-wave radio, like I have, you get news slanted to make the Americans look good from Voice of America and you get the news that is slightly tainted in some way from B.B.C., which is British Broadcasting Company.

And if you really want to hear what happened in Chicago during the riots, then you listen to local radio which, in a sense, tries to put the country down, for whatever reason. So the African, in a sense, is concerned about the movement here in this country. A couple of African students asked "What was Chicago really like?" They want to know. So it's not that there is no exchange, because there is. We felt very warm with the African people. Musically, you shake another musician's hand, even if he can't play the blues, you know, you can feel something.

**Pauline:** Well, the music was basically the bond. Getting back to the American way of life you mentioned earlier, that was criticized by Africans, what was the major American way of life that was criticized?

**Oliver:** Well, let's face it, we live in a country where everybody is basically a hypocrite, that's all. You know, well, for instance, Los Angeles, they would prefer Mayor Sam before they will put in somebody about whom there is a reasonable chance that maybe he could have been a good man. But this is what exists in this country and this is what they see, they say, "Well, how do you explain the fact that Mayor Lindsay who is white can't get anything done in New York?" You are not ready for a question like that, way over in Africa. Basically, it's the black/white situation—they understand that something is wrong, but whatever it is that's wrong has produced American music, has produced the group that we sent. Frank Strozier, they got very up tight because they thought he was white and probably rightly so, but Frank at one point said, "I am not as black as you are," and when you see Frank he really is not as black, but he is saying, "I have a black soul," and it gets complicated, very, very, complicated, to try and describe this.

**Pauline:** So we're right back to the theory can the white man sing the blues.

**Oliver:** He sure can, so it really is not a black/white thing in music. And we know that it is—the blues and jazz is black music. That we know and have established—well, there is somebody named Hugh Tracey, from South Africa, and he is trying to say that the reason whatever it is that happens in African music that makes it valid, is because it is instinctive with Africans, it's inbred.

**Pauline:** The black militants in this country keep talking about their heritage, African heritage, roots, and their freedom, etc. What if these militants, or all black people, went to Africa, what do you think would happen?

**Oliver:** Well, first of all, the physical trip is fantastic, once you cross the Atlantic and once you find the continent... I remember what happened to me. We arrived at Dakar, Senegal about 4:10 in the morning—or maybe it was later, the sun was coming up. To see the shores of Africa, you know it really was a moving thing. And when we got off the airplane and walked into the reception area...when you're in transit you're separate from the people that are disembarking. I saw people in robes, which indicated that they were Moslem, a difference of one kind or another, from a religious point of view. Most of Africa, I would say, is essentially either animist or Moslem, or essentially Catholic.

That's Africa, also. I'm saying the guy that comes from the United States to get away from the missionary influence and the Catholics and the rest of it, will find that the people that run Africa think white, first of all. When I say "think white," I mean the African elite

usually have European wives and the rest of that. They run the country and if any control will ever be maintained at any one part, it goes through these channels.

They will also find, from a cultural point of view, that they can't relate, mainly because they wouldn't understand the differences between the Hausa tribe and the Mafi tribe and the Turek tribe and the Kumba tribe, and wherever Swahili is spoken between the tribes...all down there, all these tribes are so different from each other that there is no intermarriage between tribes. They are all black but somehow a Kumba would never marry a Hausa; a Hausa would never marry a Turek.

So first of all, we have this problem, now. Even if a boy finds a girl that he's in love with and he happens to be maybe from Mauritania, which is an Arab country right above Senegal, I'm afraid he can't get permission from his family and she can't get permission from her family because they are marrying out of their cultures—whatever the hang-up is.

Now, in addition to that, if he can survive the physical discomfort of living in a subtropic or even tropic, to sit on the equator when you go to Cameroon, and experience 100 per cent humidity with 120 degree heat, if you can live through that, all right. Then he's going to have to learn French—that's completely alien. You meet an African and then he starts speaking French. But if you live in West Africa, if you're going to go back to your roots, you're going to find the French got there before you got there, and if you go to East Africa you, <sup>11</sup> find that the English have been there. If you go to the East and go along the other side towards the Indian Ocean, you'll find that the Portuguese have been there. Whatever Africa is, it's not what people think it is. Africa is Africa, and Africa has to be really left alone, because it's got its own problems. For instance, smallpox.

**Pauline:** Are you saying, then, Oliver, that in all of Africa there is no refuge...

**Oliver:** Just black Africa where I went. You will find refuge in Guinea, because it's a revolutionary-thinking type country But the Russians are also there.

**Pauline:** Where would, say, LeRoi Jones, want to go?

**Oliver:** Wherever he wants to go.

**Pauline:** And would he be accepted? Would he be happy? What would his hang-ups be in Africa? More so than in this country, do you think?

**Oliver:** If he were to go to Africa he would have to understand the African.

**Pauline:** Well, assuming he does understand, as he claims to understand, and that his roots are African. Would he be happy...

**Oliver:** If you want to say as a genesis, for a beginning, fine. Everybody has a genesis at one point or another. The beginning has to happen somewhere. If you happen to be Irish, you know, that's where it started. But I'm saying the culture is different, vastly different, and if he hasn't made the trip, by all means he should do it. 'Cause that's the only thing that's going to open his eyes, you know. From a specific point of view, for each individual who feels he wants to get back his roots, he should make the trip, and then decide from there. **Pauline:** Your going to Africa, has it helped you in any way in your life in the United States?

**Oliver:** It's made me aware that I can't waste any more time talking about going back to my roots, because my roots are here.

**Pauline:** Do you think that the introduction of black history or African history, and the study of African languages in college and high schools would be of help to the American blacks?

**Oliver:** The study of languages? For instance, in one area in Africa alone there must be at least 15, 16 dialects. Now if one lifetime is enough, then the study of one African language will not be enough time, okay? If you go up by the edge of the Sahara Desert, you'll find that the Mafi and Turek and the Hausa tribes all speak something completely different. If you really want to know what's happening, if you want to find out about history in Africa, the only history that is recorded is written in Arabic. So a guy that wants to

*find out the truth he damn well better be prepared. To go over there and say, "I'm home," is one thing, but then you have the culture to deal with, you have the physical thing to deal with, the very fact that all the tribes prefer to be left completely alone, and anybody from the States will not really be considered an outsider, but you'll never become an insider because, you know, it just isn't done.*

*And having a black face does not mean that it's automatic. It is simply not that way. They realize that all men are brothers somehow, but the differences from one tribe to another are immense. And Freddie Hill, the only member of the group that would get applause even when he didn't play because he was black...this disturbed me mainly because it occurred to me that maybe Africa is black-conscious, and then if it is, that would leave a person like me out, because like I told you before, a person of mixed blood is called a matisse, and not that that bothered me at all, but it occurred to me that a person like Frank Strozier, whereas...why should we start to define how much black blood he has in his name, because it's silly. It's a waste of everybody's time to even get involved in it.*

**Pauline:** *Would you make the trip again, Oliver?*

**Oliver:** *Yeah, yeah, of course I would. But I'm only going to go as a student. I'm not going to go as an active participant to, say...you know, I'm going to make my family learn how to speak Swahili and the rest of that. There are no Afros in Africa. The dashikis that they wear they've been wearing for a long, long time. Swahili is a word that exists only in East Africa, so if you go to West Africa, you go to North Africa, be prepared to speak some Arabic. Hausa, and Mafi, Kumba if you happen to be down in the Cameroons, and any number of African dialects in between. I mean, if you really want to get it together, one thing that the Africans use is their own music, traditional music. This is intact, it's worth that just to make the trip, just to go and hear some music that has not really succumbed to whatever it is that European or Western influences have subjected it to. That's why I say the difference between colonization and slavery obviously produced jazz, all the music that we know as American music. I don't like the word "jazz" because it doesn't cover everything.*

**Pauline:** *If you were going to meet and talk to Stokely Car-michael, or LeRoi Jones and Archie Shepp or Rap Brown, Eldridge Cleaver, what we know as the militant movement in the United States, as one black American to another, what advice would you give to them?*

**Oliver:** *No advice. You can't give anybody any advice. They should make 'the trip. They should simply make this kind of a trip.*

**Pauline:** *I don't even mean about the trip. I mean about Americans. What is the answer for black Americans?* **Oliver:** *We have to develop what we have here. It's a strange thing, I mentioned this yesterday. Everybody was saying that the one thing they were able to observe was that when Malcolm X came back from Africa he was a different person. It hasn't been defined how or what it was that had made him different. But he had to make the trip, remember? And we had one musician in our group, Stanley Gilbert, who is a Muslim, you know, the American thing, Elijah Muhammad, and in Africa he found that he was accepted when he had agreed that he would learn to read and write Arabic, because what he was embracing then was not an American kind of Islam. Islam is Islam, and it exists in Africa. So they gave him a name, and every day Stanley was out at the mosque, and he always found a friend once he let them know that he was a Muslim.*

*What he was trying to find out is the correlation between the American branch of Muslims and what is really happening in Africa, and he found that it was different. The one requirement, of course, is that he had to learn some Arabic, they don't think about that here, the American Muslims do not think about Arabic as being universally necessary.*



**Pauline:** Do you intend to salute Africa in any way in a future album?

**Oliver:** Well, that's a good question. I think probably what I've learned rhythmically will be of some use to me. **Pauline:** In my lifetime I've always been taught by what I read or what I see that American jazz music is a black man's music, and it's a unique American experience; and as I delve into the subject I begin to realize that it is true, at least to my way of thinking, that it is a black music. It seems to me that there are no European white musicians who really can play jazz, yet there are American white musicians who play jazz only because they're American, and the American black man is responsible for jazz music.

Now up until this conversation I've always felt in the back of my mind, based on talking to young black musicians, that black Africa is the place. That's where jazz came from and there must be a lot of great jazz musicians in Africa.

**Oliver:** One of the things that we did in our concerts, every concert that we did at some point, there had to be some mention of the very fact that jazz had its beginnings in Africa. And this has to be true. From anywhere along the Coast, even from the interior. Jazz had its beginning there, they were the first people who brought it to America, generally to the South. And this was our one thing that we were able to absolutely agree 100% on, is that its genesis was Africa. It had to be: from a physical point of view—crossing the ocean.

Now, we also went to the Virgin Islands, we went to all the islands that are French-speaking, all the islands that are English-speaking, all along that chain from Nassau to wherever the island chain goes. Now, it would have been just as easy for jazz to have started there, but somehow it didn't. African music continued in all these places. It continued in Nassau, Trinidad, Haiti, all these places, essentially high-life music, popular music, voo-doo, all the music that was associated with tradition, rights and everything else. All along this chain please remember that everything is accessible to the sea, but when it got to these shores, to American shores, something happened to it; and I'm saying the same thing again, that obviously the experience must have been slavery. That had to be the experience. But it does not deny any white person who can feel the experience. Actually it's almost a national pride. If Phil Woods plays the blues it's because he happens to be an American and he happens to play it better than most people I know.

**Pauline:** Well, there are always exceptions. You mentioned Woods, When we talk about Sweden or when we talk about France, Italy, we may find today one or two musicians who...

**Oliver:** In the whole country.

**Pauline:** In the whole country, who play jazz with status that we will accept. However, in the United States we know there are more white musicians that play jazz than in all the European countries. To me, Phil Woods is still an exception could think of ten alto players that I think play jazz and they're all black, and then if I was going to add one or two more that are white I could squeeze in Phil Woods

**Oliver:** But now, how many black musicians, now today how many black musicians that advocate social change and the rest of that can play the blues? It's almost like saying the new people that have come on the scene are unable to cope with the situation, maybe because they don't understand emotionally what all that was supposed to have meant. I found jazz musicians, young guys, you ask them, "Have you, ever heard of Charlie Parker?" and they will say no. It is remarkable that it is essentially American. I don't know why.'

**Pauline:** Well, we were just talking about the blues. We were limiting it to the blues. I'm not putting down a young black American musician just because he can't play the blues.

**Oliver:** *Because he doesn't understand the experience or what?*

**Pauline:** *Well, I'm not saying he is a lesser jazz musician, but this whole thing is based on...*

**Oliver:** *American music.*

**Pauline:** *American music. If a young black musician today doesn't understand or cannot play the blues, he's still saying something very important in that these things that he's saying may be the blues of 1969.*

**Oliver:** *This could be true, yes.*

**Pauline:** *Why is it that it's always the black musician that changes things or moves it in a different direction? Why is it that the only innovators are black?*

**Oliver:** *What struggle do you have in Lapland?*

**Pauline:** *Well that's the point. Okay.*

**Oliver:** *Why is it that this country is the only country that's produced it? Why is it that this country is the only country that's really multi-racially oriented? Why does it happen here? No matter what's wrong with it. You don't have any social revolution in New Zealand other than the fact that non-whites can't own property, but one day somebody's going to say why not?*

**Pauline:** *Oliver, if your son, Chip, asked you, Should I be a jazz musician, what would your advice be?*

**Oliver:** *Only if you have talent.*

Paula Rivelli, *Oliver Nelson's African Tour*, in: *Jazz&Pop*, 8/7 (1969), pp.46-50