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“A Look Outwards, A Look Inwards”:

Randy Weston and Pharoah Sanders’ Work with Gnawa Musicians

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Masters of Art
in African American Studies

by

Alfredo Rivera

2017

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“Looking Outwards, Looking Inwards”:

Randy Weston and Pharoah Sanders’ Work with Gnawa Musicians

by

Alfredo Rivera

Master of Arts in African American Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Robin Davis Gibran Kelley, Chair

In 1968, Randy Weston became the first western musician to relocate to Morocco and work with the Gnawa M’Alem, master healers and musicians whose ancestral roots can be traced to ancient empire of Ghana. Pharoah Sanders has performed and recorded with Gnawa musicians since at least the early 1990s. This thesis looks at how these two artists independently engaged Gnawa music, tradition and spirituality, and the impact their collaborations had on their own work. Neither artist was driven by commercial interests or a nostalgic desire to return to their African roots. Instead, as I will demonstrate through musical description and analysis of significant recordings and video performances, their collaborations with the Gnawa musicians generated musical innovation while paying heed to tradition, providing a particularly rich case study of musical transculturation, rehistoricization, and the use of imagination across the Black Atlantic.

The thesis of Alfredo Rivera is approved.

James Newton

Scot David Brown

Robin Davis Gibran Kelley, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2017

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The music of my race is something more than the "American idiom." It is the result of our transplantation to American soil, and was our reaction in the plantation days to the tyranny we endured. What we could not say openly we expressed in music, and what we know as "jazz" is something more than just dance music. When we dance it is not a mere diversion or social accomplishment. It expresses our personality, and, right down in us, our souls react to the elemental but eternal rhythm, and the dance is timeless and unhampered by any lineal form.

—Duke Ellington¹

¹ Duke, Ellington, *The Duke Ellington Reader*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993). ed. Mark Tucker, 49.

Introduction

What inspires African American jazz artists to seek out African music? The first thought that comes to my mind is the collective yearning for a place that holds the history and traditions of one's ancestors beyond the point of slavery. Another inspiration is that of a devoted student of music who traces the roots of the musical genre back to the motherland. When one considers the period from the 1950s to the 1970s, it becomes clear that African Americans were engaging with the African continent as a whole as it struggled to attain freedom and sovereignty, and in doing so recognized important allies in their own fight for freedom. This thesis will look at the motives that compelled Randy Weston and Pharoah Sanders to work with the Gnawa.

Once drawn to the music, history, and culture, how did each respective artist enter into the traditional world of the Gnawa and create space for fruitful collaboration without appropriation or exploitation? Often commercial artists incorporate traditional music in order to enhance their product, but never fully immerse themselves in the culture or give back to the original creators. Other artists are more respectful, incorporating folk traditions by learning how to perform the genre, and gaining further knowledge about the people who listen to and play the music. Other musicians take it further by actually living with the musicians and immersing themselves in the culture. Weston is one of the few major American jazz musicians who has lived on the African continent. Sanders, on the other hand, has a history of working with Moroccan players in the Bay Area and has recorded with Gnawa musicians from Morocco on several occasions. We shall see how the artists' different approaches to improvising and creating music with the Gnawa are both effective methods of collaboration. Collaboration is an important

process for all participants as it presents opportunities to innovate and recreate their respective genres.

The work of jazz musicians collaborating with Gnawa musicians brings down walls that may not be visible to most people—walls that divide people into groups separated by oceans and arbitrary delineated borders. In *Global Pop*, Timothy Taylor examines the work of 1970s South African duo Johnny Clegg and Sipho Mchunu, musicians who defied dominant white music business practices and challenged apartheid by merely appearing together.² When people work with others across recognized cultures, there is an exchange that happens in face-to-face encounters, such as the ones described by Jason Stanyek when discussing Pan-African collaborations. Musicians such as Weston and Sanders get to know their music collaborators in a personal way and see how their fellow players live, many times traveling to their homes and seeing the conditions of distant lands. Often they learn about the history, politics, and culture of their collaborators. All this inevitably permeates the music these musicians create, which is distinct from other music inspired by cultural ideas of players who have not had direct exchanges with members of the other society.

This thesis begins by introducing the researcher's entry into the work. Chapter One opens with a brief biography of Randy Weston, his early childhood, family influences, and cultural and political influences—including Garveyesim, African history, the Harlem Renaissance, and the Bebop Movement of the 1940s. We then move to the period of African Liberation relevant to Weston's Pan-African work before his collaboration with the Gnawa. Before discussing *Blue Moses*, his first album after his time spent with the Gnawa, we fast-forward to a 2015 performance of Weston with the Gnawa to present Gnawa music,

² Timothy Dean Taylor. *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets*. (New York: Routledge, 1997), 176.

instrumentation, repertoire, and performance practices. A musical analysis of that performance and the 1972 *Blue Moses* album follows.

Chapter Two on Pharoah Sanders introduces the racist environment of Arkansas in which he was born and how it eventually propelled him to look beyond the U.S. for musical influences. Contrary to Weston's collaboration with the Gnawa—which opens outward politically, socially, and musically—Sanders' participation with them has him look inwardly to create a spiritual connection to the music. Despite growing up in the South and being in blues bands, Sanders eventually worked with artists such as Sun Ra and John Coltrane who look to the East, other planets, and towards Africa. Sanders' musical sounds effects reveal a struggle between the constraining American landscape and the African nurturing and open music that he eventually embraces with in his work with the Gnawa.

Chapter Three hones in on the Gnawa—who they are and specific aspects relevant to their collaboration with Weston and Sanders. The point here is to explain how Weston and Sanders carved out space within Gnawa music in order to create a bridge between West African traditions and the musics of the Afro-Atlantic.

Besides interviews, reviews, journalistic accounts and scholarly studies, the main primary sources are video and sound recordings, which I analyze to construct musical descriptions and describe the form and nature of their respective collaborations. In general, academic work on Weston is more plentiful than what has been published on Sanders. Weston has also had a much longer history with the Gnawa—about a half century—and his collaborations have been subject to greater scholarly investigation than that of Sanders'. This paper looks at recordings and performances that do not appear to have been explored in

academic writing in an attempt to shed new light on important work relevant to African diaspora music creation.

I came to this research with a background as a professional jazz musician with nearly thirty years of experience in music. As an undergraduate student some years ago I started coming across ethnomusicological and adjacent literature such as Samuel Floyd's *The Power Of Black Music*, Travis Jackson's *Blowin' the Blues Away*, and Angela Davis's *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*. These works and many others informed me about the conditions under which black musicians in the United States worked, as well as insights into theoretical frameworks used by black scholars who understood what cultural elements were essential to bring out of their study of the music and the artist's participation in society.

Literature Review

Scholarly work on Gnawa music, along with Weston and Sanders' collaboration with them, is woven into the narrative of this research. Not compartmentalizing the literature was a deliberate move to not break flow for the readers. Works informing this paper are by historians, ethnomusicologists, and poets. The bibliography reveals works in Africana Studies, politics, and jazz criticism. Ethnographies on Gnawa by scholars were insightful sources that inform this paper. Weston's autobiography cowritten with W.L. Jenkins was comprehensive and along with Robin Kelley's Chapter "The Sojourns of Randy Weston" in *Africa Speaks, America Answers: Modern Jazz in Revolutionary Times* made connections to Weston's life and the world around him.

Gwen Ansell in *Soweto Blues*, includes interviews with jazz and popular music artists which are contextualized with history and politics. She reveals what foreign artists had to deal

with in terms of race when going to South Africa. Fusion of African music and African American music is explored as well as their connections. This work helps to give us part of a framework for the work done in this paper.

Chouki El Hamel in *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam* via Moroccan court histories, European travel accounts, diplomatic correspondence, and local accounts takes on old notions Morocco being a melting pot and that of a benevolent slavery in Morocco when compared to the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. He traces how blacks have been marginalized in Morocco. He tells who the Gnawa are as well as connects their experience to that of African Americans and throughout the African diaspora. El Hamel also highlights the memory of slavery in Gnawa music. These insights allow us to put together a clearer picture of what is behind the music collaboration covered in this paper.

Deborah Kapchan in *Traveling Spirit Masters: Moroccan Gnawa Trance and Music in the Global Marketplace* describes spaces and performances where spirit possession and trance traanspire with Gnawa. She looks at these performances asthey occur in Europe as well as the US. She sees parallels of racial marginalization between the Gnawa and African Americans and those in the African diaspora. Her book looks at the globalization of Gnawa music and how various artists including Weston deal with Gnawa music. The inner workings of Gnawa trance start to make more visible possible the experiences that collaborators such as Weston and Sanders have when playing this sacred music.

Penny M. Von Eschen's *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*, contributes to the understanding of cold war politics especially to how musicians were utilized by the State. How black jazz musicians who were marginalized at home would interact

with other marginalized groups on the African continent is valuable to the study in this paper. This work reveals the contradiction of utilizing jazz around the world as a symbol of democracy while having civil rights violations and poor funding of the arts at home. As both Weston and Sanders were sent by the state in different periods this work is crucial reading.

Maisie Sum's ethnomusilology dissertation, *Music Of The Gnawa Of Morocco: Evolving Spaces And Times*, is rich with explanation on who the Gnawa are and what their music sounds like. Her work adds musical analysis of improvised musical practices to growing and forthcoming Gnawa studies. This focus on improvisation reveals change occurring within this tradition. She is informed by Timothy D Fuson ethnomusicoligal doctoral work which was one of few that included musical analysis.

Timothy Rice in *Ethnomusicology: A Very Short Introduction* describes this discipline, "Ethnomusicology is the study of why, and how, human beings are musical."³ He goes on to state as many ethnomusicologists do that understanding the music from people around the world is to dive into understanding humanity itself. Although perhaps not a self-acknowledged ethnomusicologist by trade, Weston has been a student of African music in similar ways that an ethnomusicologist goes about studying music. He immersed himself in Gnawa music and culture while living there.

The above mentioned works along with those in the bibliography served as models of how to construct a study of the Gnawa and their collaboration with African American musicians. The recordings and performances covered in this paper are not described in anything of the literature encountered during this study. It is important to create a narrative for how this type of

³ Timothy Rice. *Ethnomusicology: A Very Short Introduction*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

collaboration occurs as well as providing musical analysis and the artists' own thoughts on the work. Weston, Sanders, and the Gnawa are figures worthy of more study. Weston's own work with the Gnawa in the 1990s could be one direction for a more expansive work as well as including Ellington and his connection to Africa via the work he did with those from the African diaspora.

Chapter One

Randy Weston: Looking Outwards

Weston is a giant in the musical world. His music crosses the ocean from the Americas to Africa and eventually around the world. The spiritual connections between his music and the great civilizations of the past are of great importance to Weston, and he takes every opportunity to not only speak about this relationship but to demonstrate it musically. I recently witnessed this during a concert at UCLA's Fowler Museum on September 29, 2016. He began by narrating a story of Africans in America during the nineteenth century who approached life through an African worldview. They had respect for life, food, and children. He then opened with a piano solo rendition of one of his classic compositions "African Cookbook." Danny "Big Black" Rey joined in on congas after a couple of minutes, creating a ostinato doubled on the piano.

Thelonious Monk's influences were apparent in Weston's harmonies. When bassist Alex Blake finally joined in, he played his bass in a very percussive style, striking the fingerboard and strings as if they were drums. The band's dress was Afro-centric; Weston had a black cap that may have been Muslim attire, Alex Blake wore a guayabera, and Big Black had some sunglasses, coat, pants that may have been traditionally African or at least not Western style. The next song, "Little Niles," was in 3/4 time signature and invoked the Middle East by its use of a melodic-minor scale played on the piano in its mid-register. This was a perfect demonstration of Weston being true to himself and spreading the African culture with which he so strongly identifies.

Weston's life spans from the early history of jazz to the civil rights era to the African Liberation era and into the present. Raised by a father who told him he was an African born in America oriented Weston towards Africa at a young age. He is considered a pioneer in fusing

jazz and African music. Dizzy Gillespie's "Cubop" work, built on Afro-Cuban percussionist Chano Pozo's knowledge of African music via the Caribbean, greatly influenced Weston.

To identify as an African in America is a political action. It suggests—as Malcolm X has argued—that black people in the United States were not full citizens.⁴ It suggests—as Marcus Garvey has argued—that black Americans look to Africa as their authentic homeland and consider returning. And it also suggests that black Americans identify with the new independent African nations and align with African leaders such as Presidents Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana or Ahmed Sékou Touré of Guinea. But for Weston, the question of African identity was not simply geographical or political. As he explained to me in an interview, “Africa is not the geographical locale, it is not the people, not Mount Kilimanjaro. It is the Spirit of our ancestors; it's in Sweden and Nicaragua.”⁵

Weston was born on April 6, 1926, to Frank Edward Weston of Jamaican, Panamanian, Spanish, and Caribbean descent, and to Vivian Moore from Elizabeth City, Virginia.⁶ His father was descended from Jamaican Maroons and was a Garveyite who identified himself as African when migrating from Cuba to New York just a couple years before Weston's birth. His parents separated after a few years of being together, and he divided his time between his father and mother. His parents required Weston to take piano and dance lessons. His first teacher, Lucy Chapman, enforced classical technique, but a few years later Weston studied with Professor Atwell who encouraged his passion for jazz music. Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Art Tatum, and Gillespie were significant influences on Weston.

⁴ Malcolm X, 1925-1965. *Malcolm X: The Ballot or the Bullet*, (North Hollywood: Pacifica Foundation), 1965.

⁵ Randy Weston, phone conversation with author, November 11, 2016.

⁶ Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers*, 43.

Weston was a junior to Gillespie by nearly nine years. The environment Weston was born into was shaped by World War I and the Great Migration of African Americans that began before his birth.⁷ Bedford-Stuyvesant, the Brooklyn-borough neighborhood, where he lived with his father after his parents separated, was home to many black immigrants from across the African Diaspora and is considered part of the diaspora itself.⁸ His mother exposed Weston to Southern black church music, and his father's Garveyite tendencies introduced him to African history and the Harlem Renaissance.

Weston started playing the piano at a young age and became active in the New York jazz scene during his late teens. However, he insists that he only committed to becoming a professional musician in 1959, at the age of twenty-three. Yet, as a teenager, Weston developed a friendship and musical collaboration with bassist Ahmed Abdul-Malik; they played in settings where Weston would play scales instead of chords and their music demanded tunings beyond the half steps of the Western chromatic scale. Together, they actively pushed the envelope in jazz, incorporating Arabic scales along with other 'exotic' modes in their improvisations. Although Abdul-Malik's parents hailed from the Caribbean, he nevertheless identified as Sudanese. For Kelley, Abdul-Malik's claim of Sudanese heritage pointed to "the importance of Africa in the black imagination during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s."⁹

Before delving into the work of Weston with the Gnawa, it is important to contextualize the music scene of which he was a part. Many of the musicians in Weston's Brooklyn neighborhood were leaders of the bebop movement, musicians such as Max Roach, Duke Jordan,

⁷ Randy Weston and Jenkins Willard, *African Rhythms: The Autobiography of Randy Weston* (Durham: Duke U Press, 2010).

⁸ Encyclopedia of the African Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Culture [3 volumes] Vol1:233

⁹ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers: Modern Jazz in Revolutionary Times* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 92.

Ernie Henry, Leonard Gaskin, and Cecil Payne. Weston even had a few encounters with the infamous bebop icon Charlie ‘Yardbird’ Parker and had the great fortune of playing an impromptu performance with him once. Through his association with Roach, he rubbed elbows with Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Tommy Potter and other Parker bandmates and jazz celebrities.¹⁰ During this time in the 1940s, Weston had few opportunities to play since he was working up to sixteen hours a day at his father’s restaurant. Part of his musical repertoire, which he got an opportunity to play on the weekends, included many bebop songs that were popular at the time.

As many jazz musicians from that era remind others, music was not as segregated as it is today. Weston stated, “We had the best of Calypso bands; we had the blues, we had jazz . . . every kind of music you could think of.”¹¹ From the beginning of the twentieth century, when New Orleans Jazz combined elements of brass bands, quadrilles, beguine, ragtime, and blues, to the 1940s when Gillespie along with George Russell, Chano Pozo, and several other innovative musicians invented “Cubop,” which blended bebop and Cuban music, jazz has always been a genre of music open to incorporating elements of music from around the globe without necessarily sacrificing its authenticity.

During the 1950s, heroin had hit the jazz scene and many jazz musicians, Weston included, struggled with addiction. Jazz artists devoted to art music found it much harder to survive economically than their popular music counterparts and therefore this drug epidemic was more rampant in this environment due to depression and desperation. American artists had better reception and financial success in France and other parts of Europe in their home country. In

¹⁰ Weston, *African Rhythms*, 38-42.

¹¹ Peter Keepnews. “Pop/Jazz; A Jazz Reunion in Brooklyn,” *New York Times*, July 27, 1990.

1951, he began spending summers in the Berkshire Mountains for serenity and to detox. This relocation proved not only to be a change of scenery, but its culture and active music community turned out to be an ideal environment for Weston. There he met Marshall Stearns, an English Professor at Hunter College and jazz aficionado who bucked prevailing wisdom and traced the roots of jazz back to Africa.¹² For most scholars at the time, New Orleans was the birthplace.¹³ Together, Weston and Stearns would present lectures on the history of jazz, starting in West Africa and continuing to the Caribbean and New Orleans. Weston's trio performed musical demonstrations of the modern styles of players such as Bud Powell and Thelonious Monk.¹⁴ As great as meeting Stearns was, the most impacting part of his time in Berkshire was being part of a scene at a resort named The Music Inn. There he met figures such as Nigerian drummer Olatunji, Langston Hughes, and Cuban percussionist Candido.¹⁵ Weston's struggle with addiction, his work with Stearns, and the friendships he made through it all inspired him to establish goals to help uplift jazz musicians who suffered from unemployment, alcoholism and other social ailments. He engaged in discussions with other players who shared his views that musicians needed to adopt a lifestyle that included healthy eating, and exercise, and work together to attain property where musicians could exercise, get massages, and learn languages such as Swahili and Egyptian.¹⁶ Later while residing in Morocco, he was able to establish The African Rhythms Club in Tangier. Weston ran the club and it was a cultural center that curated shows of music not often played for the locals. Chicago Blues, Gnawa music, and music from

¹² Marshall W. Stearns, *The Story of Jazz* (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 1956), 16-20.

¹³ Kelley, *Africa Speaks*, 46-47.

¹⁴ Weston, *African Rhythms*, 52.

¹⁵ Weston, *African Rhythms*, 47-49.

¹⁶ Arthur Taylor, *Notes and Tones: Musician-to-Musician Interviews*. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), 26.

the Congo were some of the genres heard in this space. Members included literati Paul Bowles, Evelyn Waugh, and UN officials.¹⁷

By the end of the 1950s, Brooklyn was developing an awareness of African music and politics.¹⁸ At this time, Weston intended to incorporate folk music into jazz but the music business was reluctant to support his vision. He needed to raise his profile before he could develop the concept of an “African Rhythms” ensemble devoted to fusing jazz and the music of Africa and the diaspora. In 1958, Weston began composing a suite to show solidarity with the African Independence Movement. He recruited Langston Hughes whom he had met at the Jazz Roundtables held by Stearns. Hughes had invited Weston to accompany some of his spoken word performances.¹⁹ He recruited trombonist and former Dizzy Gillespie band member, Melba Liston, to do the arrangements.²⁰ She and Weston shared a deep interest in African music, and she was able to shape his ideas into elaborate, innovative arrangements. She became crucial to Westons’ suite *Uhuru Africa*, which was completed in the first part of 1959.

He recorded *Uhuru Africa* in 1960, his thirteenth album released since his debut, *Cole Porter in a Modern Mood*, in 1954. Nineteen-sixty was ‘The Year of Africa.’ Between 1958 and 1963, seventeen nations gained their independence from colonial powers. African independence was partially shaped by Pan-Africanism philosophy, which emphasized solidarity and self-reliance among Africans on the continent and those in the diaspora. This new independence was also a glimmer of hope for blacks in the US during the civil rights movement.

¹⁷ Weston, *African Rhythms*, 184-193.

¹⁸ Kelley, *Africa Speaks*, 50.

¹⁹ Kelley, *Africa Speaks*, 54.

²⁰ Weston, *African Rhythms*, 73.

In *Freedom Sounds*, Ingrid Monson argues that while the 1960s are seen as the moment when African Americans begin to connect with their African roots, in reality black scholars such as W.E.B. Du Bois was involved in several Pan Africanist conferences from the beginning of the century through the mid-1940s.²¹ There was a general awareness among blacks that their struggles in America were linked to Black people throughout the world, especially Africa.

Weston was engaged in various organizations. The American Society of African Culture (AMSAC) was a cultural and political exchange program between the US and various nations on the African continent. This organization existed during the years 1957-1969.²² Through AMSAC Weston took his first trip to the continent—a brief tour to Nigeria in December 1961, along with a delegation of artists that included Langston Hughes, choreographer Geoffrey Holder; singers Nina Simone, Odetta, Martha Flowers, and Brock Peters, concert pianist Natalie Hinderas; and band leader Lionel Hampton. In fact, Weston's group was hired to back Hampton.²³ Weston recalls that his pilgrimage to the motherland was spiritual.²⁴ Weston later became aware that the CIA was backing AMSAC, he credits the organization with creating immense opportunities to connect with Africa and to meet many prominent black artists and intellectuals—most notably, his longtime hero Paul Robeson.²⁵

²¹ Ingrid T. Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 107

²² Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 197–224

²³ Weston, *African Rhythms*, 103.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid,

Weston returned to Nigeria in 1963 and toured the African continent in 1967 as part of a U.S. cultural delegation by the State Department.²⁶ Although Weston participated in the State Department tours to advance U.S. interests by means of cultural diplomacy, he was not interested in the project of spreading American democracy and enterprise abroad. Instead, he saw the tours as opportunities for real cultural immersion and exchange. Indeed, he often flaunted protocol by wearing dashikis and other local clothing styles instead of traditional suits.

As a result of these trips, he absorbed the culture and music and continued to collaborate with musicians from the continent, expanding his musical concepts and learning invaluable lessons that he may not have been able to pick up without spending time there. His last stop on the State Department tour was Morocco, where he took up residence a year later and remained until 1972. Out of the various groups in Morocco, Weston connected with the Gnawa people. At the time, the Gnawa did not hold a prestigious place among the population mainly due to anti-black racism. Weston played a big part in turning negative perceptions of Gnawa around and encouraging Africans to discover their relation to this rich culture. He met his friend and long-time collaborator Abdullah el-Gourd by way of a seemingly mystic tease where a mysterious man asked Weston if he had heard the music of the Gnawa. When Weston replied that he had not, the man remarked that one had not heard African music until one heard the Gnawa. Over time, el-Gourd had described Gnawan spiritual ceremonies involving Lilas to Weston. After a couple of years in Morocco, during a time when Westerners were not welcome to participate in the Lilas, Weston persuaded a Gnawa chief to allow him to be an observer as he felt compelled by the spirits to see this important ceremony. Gnawi songs are associated with various colors. Different rhythms have alternate colors, and the colors are linked to particular spirits and saints.

²⁶ Deborah Kapchan, *Traveling Spirit Masters: Moroccan Gnawa Trance and Music in the Global Marketplace*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 33.

Colors range from white representing peace, love, and goodness to other colors that are considered perilous. In *African Rhythms*, Weston describes eleven colors in Gnawi music along with characteristics, people or saints associated with each color.²⁷ Weston identified with dark blue the most, which is associated with the sky and its greatness, beauty, and ambiguity.²⁸

In 1972, Weston recorded an album titled *Blue Moses* which is a rough translation from the Arabic “Sidi Musa,” which means Saint Moses whom the Gnawa identify as the color blue. The focus of the album was the Moroccan culture to which Weston was exposed. The opening track “Ifrane” was the name of a town where, to Weston’s surprise, it snowed; this fact compelled Weston to compose this piece. The song “Gnawa (Blue Moses)” was a Weston adaptation of Gnawa traditional Lila music, which at first the elders forbade him to perform in public but eventually relented. It begins with Weston’s comping an introductory chord progression on synthesizer. On the and of the second beat percussion enters and Hubert Laws joins in on flute in the third beat of the opening bar which is in 4/4. Both the percussion and flute are sparse, but one can make out the 12/16 (grouped in threes) and 6/8 subdivisions in the percussion section and some of the electric piano rhythmic figures. At one minute into the song the percussion sets up a triple meter that seems to be in 6/8 but can also be felt in 4/4, there is a hemiola occurring between the horn section, which has four trumpets, four trombones, and two French horns; and the rhythm section which has a forceful Billy Cobham on drum set, Ron Carter on bass, and Weston on electric piano along with three percussionists. Weston begins the melody, which repeats four times and then riffs off part of that motif four times and changes a small portion again for a total of two more times before repeating it all. The overall song goes seamlessly back and forth between 4/4 and 3/4 time signatures over a 92 bar form. Overall the

²⁷ Weston, *African Rhythms*, 173

²⁸ Ibid.

chord progressions move between blues and modal. The featured soloists are Freddie Hubbard, Grover Washington Jr., Weston, and then Laws along with drums and percussion with the whole band doing hits in the background.

“Night in Medina,” the third track on the LP, invoked a haunting feeling that Weston felt when he went out to the streets in the middle of the night. His experience contrasted sharply with the city’s daytime bustle and noise. The final composition for the CTI date was “Marrakech Blues” which played tribute to a town he felt was magical.²⁹ Weston had to make several concessions to label owner Creed Taylor, which included using a Fender Rhodes electric piano. Weston disliked electric pianos but Taylor wanted to capitalize on the instrument’s popularity at the time. Another surprise for Weston came when he first heard Don Sebesky’s orchestrations that were overdubbed. He had no control over production, and he was completely unaware of the added orchestrations until he received the record in the mail. Nevertheless, “Blue Moses” turned out to be Weston’s biggest hit of his career. It netted healthy royalties and allowed him to pay musicians who had performed at the Tangiers Festival, which he had organized. Weston desperately needed the money since his financial backers had withdrawn support at the last minute.³⁰

Gnawa music is now performed fairly regularly in New York City and, as Deborah Kapchan demonstrates, Western artists have benefitted commercially from fusing their music with Gnawi music.³¹ But Weston’s approach to collaboration reveals his “exposure to the

²⁹ Randy Weston, Liner notes to *Blue Moses*, (King KICJ 8338. CD., 1999).

³⁰ Kapchan, *Traveling Spirit*, 134.

³¹ Hisham Aidi, “Claude McKay and Gnawa Music,” *New Yorker*, September 2, 2014.

politics, of independence and internationalism, and in [his] roles as [a] cultural ambassador.”³²

The time he spent in Africa was a real homecoming and a dream fulfilled. He was raised as an African born in America. In his search for the connections between jazz and African rhythms, he explored making music outside of a conventional Western approach. He attributed Africans’ recognition of his playing to being close to their own which stemmed from having absorbed much of the culture, unlike other Westerners who merely alluded to Africa and summoned partial elements of African music. During his time in Morocco, he fulfilled a lifelong dream of establishing a cultural arts center and producing a festival to display African American jazz artists next to African master musicians. Weston maintained his vision of blending jazz and African artists, recording yet another powerful version of “Blue Moses” in 1991 on his CD *Spirits of Our Ancestors*. It also included “African Sunrise,” a composition featuring Dizzy Gillespie, Pharoah Sanders, Idris Muhammad, Talib Kibwe and many other all-star musicians. As mentioned previously, Gillespie was an inspiration for Weston’s choice to feature Cuban and African drums in his bands. A year later another longtime desire from his initial trip was realized when Weston recorded Gnawan Maalams (masters) and joined them on one song, “Chalabati.”³³ The next night he recorded, *Marrakech in the Cool of the Evening*, a solo piano album that earned him a Grammy years later. The power of the music from the Maalam session seems to have carried over into this fortuitous turn of events.

³² Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 178

³³ Weston, *African Rhythms*, 229.

Chapter Two

Pharoah Sanders Goes Within

Sanders's birth was shaped by events that took place in Little Rock, Arkansas, before his birth. On May 4, 1927, a white mob of about 5,000 lynched African American Jon Carter and started a riot. Race relations had been sensitive before that due to mob violence occurring in 1874. In 1957, Sanders was a student at Scipio Jones High School when white mobs backed by the governor tried to block federally mandated integration at neighboring Little Rock Central High School. . This incident created outrage among many including jazz luminary Charles Mingus who would compose "Fables of Faubus" in which the Arkansas governor Orval E. Faubus ridiculed for trying to prevent nine African American teenagers from attending the all-white school. Many years later, Sanders testified to the intensity of racism growing up in Little Rock. In a 2005 interview with Fikisha Cumbo for Cace International TV, he recalled having to fight whites on his way to the grocery store and back.

Farrell Sanders was born on October 13, 1940. He was an only child born to a mother who was a school cook and father who worked for the City.³⁴ Sanders lived near a church that played music nightly into the wee hours of the morning. His grandfather was a math and music teacher. Sanders grew up with music all around him. While in High School, he was a painter and started playing sax around fifteen years of age. Jimmy Cannon was Sanders's high school music teacher who started him on the flute-a-phone. Afterward, Sanders played the clarinet before moving on to alto and eventually tenor saxophone. Sanders admits to cutting most of his classes to practice in the band room and immerse himself in the music. Cannon was a trumpeter that introduced Sanders to jazz. Charlie Parker, James Moody, Sonny Rollins, and Harold Land were

³⁴ Ashley Kahn, "Pharoah Sanders: Jewels of Thought," *Jazz Times*, January 1, 2008.

the saxophonists who most influenced his approach to the instrument. Earl Bostic, a saxophonist from Arkansas along with one of his band members, John Coltrane, were significant influences on young Sanders, as well.

Sanders was drawn to the tenor, which would become his closest instrument because he wanted to learn to play the blues. He listened to his father's Louis Jordan recordings and blues singers from Arkansas such as Albert King. This gave Sanders a strong blues foundation, which Sanders further built on when playing blues gigs around his hometown and backing up greats like Bobby "Blue" Bland and Junior Parker. After High School, he moved to Oakland with relatives and formed a straight-ahead jazz group in 1960.

Oakland and San Francisco had a strong black music scene that went back to the early days of jazz and prohibition and strengthened after World War II and into the present day. The Bay Area black musicians' union, Local 648, which was founded in 1923, was based in Oakland and did not merge with the white union, Local 6, until 1960 which was seven years later than the merge of Los Angeles black local 767 and white local 47 in 1953. A slew of jazz venues were spread across the Bay Area from the Black Hawk (also known as Turk and Hyde), the Both/And, The Great American Music Hall, Say When, Club Hangover, Mocombo, Fack's I & II, The Dawn Club, The Tin Angel and Pier 23 along with many more. Many great jazz musicians such as Jelly Roll Morton, Kid Ory, Duke Ellington, Art Tatum, Lester Young, John Coltrane, Gerry Mulligan, Chet Baker, and Miles Davis performed in the Bay area.

While in Oakland, Sanders studied art and music at Oakland Junior College for one summer.³⁵ The band he formed while in college was called the "Oakland Raiders" and was considered to be fairly avant garde. Sanders states that in this band they also played bebop and

³⁵ Tom Terrell, October 01, 2000. "Pharoah Sanders: Moonchild," (JazzTimes, 2000).

ballads along with a wide variety of musical styles. At this time, Sanders met Coltrane at The Jazz Workshop. Despite the connection and having sat in with Coltrane at The Half Note club, financial constraints made it impossible for Sanders to stay in touch.

A year later, in 1961, Sanders moved to New York and continued to struggle to make a living. He was homeless and often went hungry. Sanders eventually landed a job as a cook at The Playhouse, which was a coffee shop on the lower level and music club on the top level. There he met Sun Ra, who offered him a job collecting admission at the door for “Sun Ra and His Orchestras,” though he remained working as a cook. Eventually, Sanders told Sun Ra that he played saxophone and if he needed a player he was available. Sun Ra initially had no use for another tenor player but he did put Sanders up in his commune and, over time, Sanders replaced John Gilmore who went on the road with Art Blakey’s Jazz Messengers. Sun Ra christened Sanders with the name “Pharoah” which was a play on Ferrell’s name and created an association with the Egyptian ideology that played a big part of Sun Ra’s aesthetics. Sanders recorded his debut album, *Pharoah’s First* on September 10, 1964. Sanders credits Sun Ra as an influence for using sounds such as tambourines, bells, and other “rhythm” instruments in his music.³⁶ After leaving Sun Ra’s ensemble, Sanders continued to struggle in New York until a relative sent him a bus ticket to return home.

While in Arkansas, some of Sanders’s family members from California were there, and he came back to Oakland with them. That first week back, John Coltrane was in San Francisco; both exchanged phone numbers and the next day Coltrane hired Sanders. Sanders did not believe he was ready to join the band, but Coltrane was more interested in what his fellow saxophonist

³⁶ CACEINTERNATIONALTV, “Pharoah Sanders Part II on Cace International Tv,” (YouTube video, 2010).

offered as a person. Coltrane said about Sanders, “Pharoah is a man of large spiritual reservoir, always trying to reach out to [the] truth,” continuing his praises, “he is trying to allow his spiritual self to be his guide. He has will and spirit, and those are the qualities I like most in a man.”³⁷ Trane considered Sanders an innovator and appreciated his contribution of energy and essence to his group. Ornette Coleman’s *Chappaqua Suite* featured Sanders a couple of weeks before his first recording with Coltrane. Coleman stated, “One larger-than-life note from Sanders' saxophone can permeate a room,”³⁸ and earlier had said that Sanders was “possibly the best tenor player in the world.”³⁹

Sanders went on to record twenty-seven times with Trane’s various ensembles. Thirteen records were released, not including re-releases, the rest were private, unissued and rejected by Impulse! “The label that Trane built” as it is now known. Sanders first joined Coltrane on *Ascension* recorded in 1965. An early classic in the “free jazz” genre, it was not initially understood by the public or critics. This marked a definite change from *A Love Supreme* recorded just six months earlier. There were no instructions given to the soloists except to end with a crescendo. Coltrane’s Classic Quartet rhythm section featured on this recording, McCoy Tyner on piano, Jimmy Garrison on upright bass, and Elvin Jones on drums, was subsequently replaced as Coltrane moved further into free jazz. Sanders remembered a feeling of spirituality and commonality among the players due to the collective improvisation on *Ascension*.⁴⁰ Sanders began his solo with flutter tonguing in the upper register, squawks into the altissimo range, and

³⁷ Bill Forman, “The Ascension of Pharoah Sanders: John Coltrane's Musical and Spiritual Collaborator Talks About a Few of His Favorite Things,” *Metroactive*, April 19, 2006.

³⁸ Gale Thomson, “Sanders, Pharoah,” *Contemporary Black Biography*. *Encyclopedia.com.*, October 16, 2007.

³⁹ Raul Da Gama, “The Pharoah Sanders Story: Pharoah Sanders in the Beginning 1963-1964,” *Jazz da Gama*, March 13, 2014.

⁴⁰ David Glen Such, *Avant-Garde Jazz Musicians: Performing “Out There,”* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993).

effects that summon something “primal,” as bassist Joel Ector who has accompanied Sanders described his playing.⁴¹ The growling effect went into bird calls and animal sounds, combined with cries and moans,. Sanders’s role, as McCoy played a sequence of chord changes, was to lay a soundscape that evoked strong emotion. His playing sounded like pleading and after two and a half minutes of soloing was joined by the other souls who came in seeming to plea to a Higher Being as well. Coltrane expressed, “What I like about [Sanders] is the strength of his playing.” This power was fully displayed via Sanders’ bigger than life tone on this album. A fellow bandmate on later dates, Albert Ayler, stated that Coltrane was the Father, Sanders was the Son, and he (Ayler) was the Holy Ghost.⁴² Sanders went on to work with Coltrane for a couple of years before Coltrane died of liver cancer. During his work with Coltrane, Sanders tried to lead a band as well and recorded *Tauhid* under his name and two albums with Don Cherry and another one with Alice Coltrane before John Coltrane’s passing.

Throughout all his recordings Sanders played several instruments from mostly Africa and Asia. The sounds created by these foreign instruments contribute to dense soundscapes intended to free the mind of his listeners and transport them to another space and time. These instruments were the tenor saxophone, alto saxophone, soprano saxophone, contrabass clarinet, alto flute, reed flute, fifes, vocals, piccolo, bells, maracas, African thumb piano, orchestral chimes, koto, brass bells, balafon, cow horn, shakers, and bowls. He included violin, harmonium, organ, synthesizer, sitar, koto, sarod, chandrasarang , kora, dousongonn, chatan, electric piano guitar, shakuhachi, trumpet, french horn, tuba, African drums, claves, finger cymbals ring cymbals, tambura, congas, talking drum, bell tree, Indian mridangum drums, bendir, sakara ceramic

⁴¹ Joel Ector, phone call with author, December 15, 2015.

⁴² Da Gama, “The Pharoah Sanders Story.”

drums, gongs, wind chimes, shekere, frame drums, udu drums, wooden box, mbira, heatbeats, vibraphone, whistle, shouts, bird effects, yodeling, and overtone singing,

Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI) lists one hundred and fourteen compositions for Ferrell Sanders. All songs on his debut album were Sanders originals. Sanders was commissioned to write for the Lines Ballet of San Francisco.⁴³ In his compositions, he has used Japanese, Egyptian, African, and many elements from around the world. His original compositions reflected his concerns, evidenced by titles such as “The Creator Has a Master Plan”, “Wisdom Through Music”, “Our Roots Began in Africa” and many more songs that address spiritual enlightenment, Black Consciousness, Love, Socio-Political Issues, and other areas of the human experience.

Released in 1966, the year the Black Panthers were founded in Oakland, *Tauhid* begins with “Upper & Lower Egypt.” The piece starts out with a cymbal crash struck with a mallet and soft piano duet. Pianist Dave Burrell plays in a cascading style, and the percussion (Nat Bettis, drummer Roger Blank, and others) continues to seep in more with shakers, idiophones, and tom drums. Henry Grimes plays a bass ostinato all the while as Sonny Sharrock strums his electric guitar in the lower register. A minute and a half into the song Blank establishes a cymbal pattern and the rest of the rhythm section continues to play very openly on an ostinato mode. After several swells and decrescendos, Grimes plays arco beginning from the lowest range and Sanders joins in shortly after more than five minutes into the song with a piccolo flute. He hums as he plays forcefully emphasizing his humming and throat sounds. The tones that are played are pentatonic. This section is mostly duet with some percussion sprinkled in throughout. After a couple of minutes, Blank and Bettis are featured soloists—unaccompanied at first, until Grimes

⁴³ Thomson, “Sanders, Pharoah.”

plays an ostinato that is quickly supplemented with drum and percussion set, then piano, and finally guitar. After a minute, heavily syncopated African percussion takes center stage. Africanisms arise with the layering of established syncopated timelines and interlocking parts. After a few minutes Sanders comes in with a fiery tenor saxophone playing short, catchy melodic lines repeated a couple of times and then moves quickly into free playing over the hypnotic repetitive vamp. Sanders plays in the altissimo register, and screams into his horn, which is reminiscent of the type of trance state church attendees in his hometown, would go into during services. The piano then plays the melody and Sanders sings the tune with vocables and in an unclear manner appears to chant a universal “Aum.” Sanders’ childhood experiences in the church help his affinity with the East and Japanese scales which are pentatonic just as in the church tradition. The track then quiets down and concludes. Although many years ahead of his collaboration with Gnawa musicians who induce trance, this song is an early example of Sanders’ ability to create music designed for listeners to have out of body experiences.

In “Diasporacentrism and Black Aural Texts,” Robert Elliot Fox looks at several Sanders compositions on *Tauhid*, *Africa*, and *Message From Home* to track a narrative of the black experience from Egypt to America. He does not isolate the experience in one land from another; rather he acknowledges the shared context within the matrix they are in.⁴⁴ *Tauhid*’s track names point to Japan, Aum, and even Venus, Fox highlights how the music corresponds with the global and multicultural aspect of blackness. When looking at *Africa*, Fox sees “Origin” as pointing to Africa. Fox asks of the last album, “Where is Home?” He acknowledges the most obvious response would be Africa but states that the rest of the diaspora would say, “here.” For African-

⁴⁴ Carole Boyce Davies, Okpewho Isidore, and Mazrui Ali Al’Amin. *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 374

Americans, the answer is both Africa and the States. Fox observes that “Country Mile” insinuates a US rural black experience but that the music is more South African and thereby creates a call and response between both continents.⁴⁵

In a 1994 interview, just three months after his trip to Essaouira, Morocco where he recorded *The Trance of Seven Colors*, Sanders revealed part of his experience of recording with Maleem Mahmoud Ghania and other master Gnawa musicians.⁴⁶ The interviewer referenced the liner notes to confirm with Sanders that the music was performed in the context of a ritual ceremony. Sanders repeated the question “Ceremony?” and added that he simply played. He communicated to the Charles Blass, the interviewer, that he got to know the musicians and get as close to the players as he could and then went on to record with them. In Sanders’ opinion, the experience was perhaps more involved for the Gnawa as they have a spiritual connection to the music as to where he is simply there to perform and be Pharoah Sanders. He communicated that playing this music was nothing new to him as he had previously played with Muslim Moroccan musicians in Northern California. He expressed that there was something different about playing with this group than with others. Sanders mentioned that he did not tune in with the other musicians as he had with various players from around the world, rather he tuned into himself and went on playing. His intonation in relation to the other players did not seem to matter. He likened the spiritual experience to that of a singer, one assumes that perhaps he may be referring to church singers or any religious singer who may not have a full score or may not even know the destination of a song but goes on feeling and centers partially on themselves and their abilities to

⁴⁵ Robert Elliot Fox, “Diasporacentrism and Black Aural Texts,” in , *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities* ed. Davies, Carole Boyce, Isidore, Okpewho, and Ali Al’Amin Mazrui, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 375

⁴⁶ Charles Blass, “Encountering the Trance of Seven Colors through Pharoah Sanders,” (Glendora Review: African Quarterly on the Arts, 2004).

get through the performance. Being the lead soloist and featured performer would allow Sanders to take this position as opposed to having to be in the rhythm section and having to contribute specific rhythms and patterns to the groove and supporting other players. Although he compliments the ensemble through his tone, feeling, and improvisation, it is the ensemble that has the responsibility for providing a foundation strong enough to support Sanders' imaginative playing and make it appear seamless. Sanders stated he played off the guimbri more than anything. The lower frequencies of this stringed instrument had him shift to playing lower on the tenor saxophone than he usually plays and changed how he mentally approached improvising. As for the clappers (krakebs), he did not pay much attention to them. In this interview, he reaffirmed that he was not a jazz player and that he gravitated more toward Eastern music.

An interview from two years later catches up with Sanders to speak about his album *Message From Home* which uses African music and musicians. On the track "Kumba," Foday Musa Suso who is a direct descendant of the griot who invented the kora joins Sanders on this electrified song that pivots between ancient times and the future. When asked about his relation to African music, Sanders states that he feels at home with high-life music and dances to it at home. He feels playing this music comes naturally to him. This is evident on "Country Mile" from this album as well as in the numerous times this author has seen Sanders break into song and dance on high-life inspired pieces from his live sets.⁴⁷

Sanders incorporated African percussion and various Africanisms in his music via timelines, rhythm, instruments, and ostinato phrases that created an inviting space for him to improvise freely and at length. From *Izipho Zam (My Gifts)* in 1969 to *Thembi* in 1970 and numerous other albums throughout that decade, Sanders featured percussionists such as Chief

⁴⁷ Jesse Hamlin, "Q and A With Pharoah Sanders." (SFGate, May 12, 1996).

Bey, James Mtume, Anthony Wiles and many others who played a wide variety of idiophones characteristic of the African continent such as the congas, talking drum, and balafon to name a few. His sidemen also played African instruments such as Joe Bonner on the cow horn, which is an aerophone, Lonnie Smith, played the idiophone known as the mbiri or African thumb piano, and fellow saxophonist Gary Bartz would play other idiophones such as the shakers and cowbells. A particular Sanders studio recording from 1994 stands out to Luigi Onori and various other scholars as representative of his work with African music and musicians. Onori contrasts Sanders involvement with the Gnawa people to Weston's thirty-year relationship with them as being mystic and intuitive. Sanders is said to have referred to their music as their own and his at the same time.⁴⁸

The *Trance of Seven Colors* stands out as an album that showcases Sanders communing musically with Gnawan masters. Guembri player Maleem Mahmoud Ghania who hailed from Morocco led an African group of musicians on this date. Ghania had lent his talents to famous artists such as Carlos Santana, Will Calhoun, and Adam Rudolph and was respected as one of the most skilled guembri practitioners. The recording was held at Ghania's home, and the entire eight women chorus singing on the album consisted of his relatives, along with his father Maleem Boubker Ghania who was a master guembri player in his own right. Except for two original songs, "La Allah Dayim Moulenah" co-composed by Sanders and Ghania and "Peace in Essaouira (For Sonny Sharrock)" the rest of the nine songs on the album are traditional Gnawan compositions that are associated with the Lila rituals. All these songs serve to heal people spiritually and must be led by a Maleem as is the case on this album.

⁴⁸ Luigi Onori, *Jazz E Africa: Griot, Musicisti E Fabulatori (Jazz and Africa: Griots, Musicians and Story-tellers)*, (Anzio: De Rubeis, 1996), 59.

“Hamdouchi,” arranged by Maleem Abdelkabir Addabachi, begins with one rhaita player playing six ornamented notes and then being joined by a second rhaita player and two hand drummers. The melody is based on an Arabic scale (maqam) and is played heterophonically by both players taking breaks and breaths in different places and slightly placing the phrases on various parts of the beat. The drums are playing duple meter at a walking tempo. Within a minute, the drums speed up the pace and Sanders joins in with an ascending line outlining the Arabic scale: Bb, B, D, Eb, F, G and then descending back in reverse. Rather than choosing to play seven notes for this scale, Sanders alters the typical arabic scale by only going to the sixth degree and playing a major sixth instead of flatted sixth. Sanders does not lock himself into thinking of modes and scales but plays each note with intention as he remembers blues guitarists doing when he was growing up. The North-West African double reed instruments (rhaitas) continue to build the intensity with their microtonal playing that is quite distinct from the European aesthetic of “perfect” intonation, the lines they are playing are moving faster than the lines Sanders is milking in ballad or meditation style whole notes with soft cutoffs to the notes all the while sticking close to the Arabic scale. As this timeline is laid down further, Sanders begins to interact more with the rhythmic aspect of the music by having punctuated cutoffs to his notes and more staccato phrasing as well as shorter length notes. The tenor’s second lowest note B is sounded as a motif that emphasizes two quarter-notes and signals the drummers to vary the rhythm more and progress to another level of intensity. Another rhythmic device employed by Sanders is a one-beat phrase that consists of an eighth note and three thirty-second-note triplets. Eventually, Sanders plays several lines similar to the grace-note melodies of the rhaitas. As he moves to higher ranges of his instrument and plays growls and multi-phonics, the drummers continue playing polyrhythms. Where Sanders began more melodic along the Arabic mode, he

continues to improvise in a more free jazz form and growling with his voice through the instrument saying “Ah.” He concludes his solo with the opening line played down in the lowest part of his tenor at a much faster speed over and over-emphasizing the last two notes of the descending line with varying duration. He decrescendos into silence, and after a few beats, the rest of the players end almost abruptly. As stated in the liner notes to the album, the Lilas are played in a certain order, and the ensemble can only move on after it has reached a particular state. These songs are played for hours but are abbreviated for purposes of this recording.

Having been born into a racist nation, Sanders used music as a vehicle to explore beyond the limitations of his environment. His journey had many hardships such as being homeless, pigeonholed, and overlooked on the way to becoming an NEA jazz master and icon. Egyptian and pentatonic modes provided better avenues than western based scales for Sanders to best express his struggle and spiritual quest. Just as the Gnawa’s music is about healing so is the music of Sanders. By christening Sanders as Pharoah, Sun Ra continued to point a young Sanders towards Egypt and Africa as many knowledgeable, and prominent jazz musicians have done since early on. Africa had not only an ancestral connection for African Americans like Sanders but those throughout the diaspora. The continent also benefited and continued to communicate with African-American musical genres since the beginning of travel back and forth between the old and new land. Coltrane catapulted Sanders into the national spotlight as he was one of the leaders of the jazz community and famous artist. As a member of Coltrane’s group, Sanders was encouraged to experiment, and more than anything to go within to communicate with his highest spiritual self. Even though in the beginning Coltrane appeared larger than life to Sanders, eventually Sanders came to be regarded as a crucial contributor to the music by Coltrane.

When going on to a solo career, Sanders continued to be innovative by incorporating yodeling and distinct musical timbres to his artistic creations. More than likely, there was more meaning to the titles of his songs and albums but Sanders is not always forthcoming with explanations of his work. In interviews, he remains tight-lipped and vague in answering certain questions. This researcher has enjoyed many meals, backstage chats, and conversations at his home and that of friends but currently has not been able to have Sanders agree to discuss his work with the Gnawa or any aspect of his career. Although open to talking freely about life, when it comes to his music it appears that he prefers to let the music speak for itself. It is up to scholars to make connections within Sanders work to greater issues that can benefit society. My research suggests that Sanders approached the Gnawa like a religious singer on the saxophone while appearing to be disconnected to the more sacred dimensions of the culture. The Gnawa work within the spiritual world and therefore require that ritual participants leave their mundane roles and travel to where one can communicate with one's ancestors.

Chapter 3

Who are the Gnawa?

Many Western musicians have collaborated with musicians from Morocco since the 1950s. Jazz saxophonist Ornette Coleman in 1973, Brian Jones of The Rolling Stones in 1968, and prior to that, Brion Gysin and poet William S. Burroughs in the 1950s, who were leaders of the Beat Generation, all collaborated with The Master Musicians of Joujouka⁴⁹ who could be classified under classical Sufi music genre of Morocco which is one of the six traditional Moroccan music styles. Gnawa is one of the other traditional music styles of Morocco. Weston, a disciple of Gillespie, was one of the first Americans to collaborate with the Gnawa

Prior to Chouki El Hamel's *Black Morocco*, there was no book in publication with depth and scope on the history of slavery in Morocco.⁵⁰ El Hamel had to balance Western sources he encountered on Morocco with other records to avoid absorbing the bias present within them. He covers mostly the history of Black Moroccans from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. El Hamel writes that black Moroccans were there before Arab and white settlers. Consulting various secondary sources centered on significant figures in society and primary sources from Morocco's Royal and National Libraries, he reads against the grain to narrate black Moroccan history. He also informs us significantly on the Gnawa.

The Gnawa are black Moroccans originally from West Africa. The term Gnawa also refers to their religious and spiritual practices as well as their musical ones.⁵¹ As for ethnicity, black Moroccans' ancestors were Haratin; some whom were free and others who had been slaves

⁴⁹ Chris Morris, "Jajouka Rolling Stone: Brian Jones' Moroccan Musical Adventure and Its Legacy," (Nightflight.com., 2016).

⁵⁰ Chouki El Hamel, *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 7.

⁵¹ El Hamel, *Black Morocco*, 270.

in the Saharan slave trade. Great Gnawa communities have existed in Marrakesh, Essaouira, Meknes, and Fez.⁵² Religiously they are mystics, which sets them apart within Islam. Gnawa religion and music are not entirely separable. When Gnawa publicly perform their song and dance repertoire, they create a space to remember slavery and migration, and to commemorate their freedom.⁵³ Their music speaks of the various trials and tribulations they have had to endure throughout their time in Morocco. Despite experiencing marginalization for most of their time in Moroccan society, presently Gnawa music commands a popular status as a national genre that is global. El Hamel compares the Gnawa in Morocco with the antebellum American South and other current parallel conditions.⁵⁴ The study of Gnawa exposes similarities between them and black spiritual groups in Africa as well as in African diaspora communities in El Salvador, Belize, Brazil, and elsewhere.

Key figures are introduced in *The Splendid Master Gnawa Musicians Of Morocco* produced by Randy Weston and recorded in 1992 on a two-track digital recorder in the ballroom of the La Mamounia Hotel. Weston plays on one of the three tracks of the album but the other two showcase the Gnawa masters alone. Nine master Gnawa musicians hailing from Sale, Rabat, Casablanca, Marrakech, Tangier, and Essaouira played over a three-day period. This was a rare occasion, some of these masters had not seen each other for over forty years.

Gnawa Collaboration

Although now located in North Africa, the Gnawa are slave-descendant brought North from Bambara, Fulani, and Hausa ethnic groups with history in the Niger river bend area of Mali

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 271.

and Niger.⁵⁵ There have been parallels made between Gnawa music and Mississippi Delta blues. This Moroccan music seems more akin to American than to Arab music. Weston stated that when he first heard Gnawa music, he thought of the origin of the blues, church music, and jazz all at the same time. As Gerhard Kubik has stated in *Africa and the Blues*, the misguided concern to find the ‘roots’ of African American music should be replaced by a search for which eighteenth- to nineteenth-century traditions preceded the blues, channeling experiences and energies into the formative process of this music, and to find in which parts of Africa these traditions were established”⁵⁶

Gwen Ansell in *Soweto Blues* contrasts colonial and apartheid musicologists who had limited perceptions of Africans, treating them as inferior compared to “advanced” musicians such as Dizzy Gillespie who famously praised the excellent musicianship and skill of the Pedi people of South Africa who could play a rubber pipe and still keep time – a skill most trained musicians would find impossible.⁵⁷ There are many exercises an ethnomusicologist could perform in connecting African-American jazz and music from various parts of the African continent. Kubik confirms that “blues-like patterns can be traced in the music of descendants of slaves in Morocco,”⁵⁸ which give more weight to what Weston heard in his first Gnawa music encounter after being a musician for nearly three and a half decades.

Musical Analysis

In a 2015 performance and talk for the New School of Music in New York, Abdellah El Gourd relays that Gnawa repertoire consists of two hundred and forty songs and over twelve

⁵⁵ Timothy D. Fuson, “The Gnawa And Their Lila: An Afro-Maghrebi Ritual Tradition.” Sonispheric.net.

⁵⁶ Gerhard Kubik, *Africa and the Blues*. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 4.

⁵⁷ Gwen Ansell, *Soweto Blues: Jazz, Popular Music, And Politics in South Africa*, (New York: Continuum, 2004), 5.

⁵⁸ Gerhard Kubik, *Africa and the Blues*. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 67.

colors, seven which are original and five that are complimentary. He continues to say that the instrumentation consists of taboul (a drum), krakebs, which are large metallic castanets, and a three-stringed bowed bass lute called a guembri. He adds that all the musicians dance as well. Weston continues to expand and communicate that the musicians' roles in the community are critical and are primarily healers and keepers of its traditions. This music is mystical and ceremonial. El Gourd then proceeds to perform what is possibly a Chaabana song, which is performed yearly one month before Ramadan⁵⁹ as no Gnawa musicians can play during that holy time.

In this chapter, I will analyze El Gourd's New School performance with and without Weston to illustrate the Gnawa elements in "Blue Moses" and how Weston blends in and out this aesthetic in a live collaboration. El Gourd begins with a pentatonic melody which is roughly G, A, C, D, and E. He foreshadows a theme that is similar to the one on Weston's classic album. Maisie Sum groups common Gnawa rhythmic elements into a graph (Figure 1), which is helpful in understanding this piece.⁶⁰ El Gourd plays an eight note melody, made up of sixteenth notes and two eight note rests, once before the three krakeb players begin their 6/8 rhythm; which is one eight note, followed by two sixteenth notes, and then another eighth note all of which is played twice in a bar and then repeated over and over while they dance. This melody is followed by El Gourd singing in a loud, raspy voice with a call and response from the other musicians. "Sidi Musa," which is the Arabic name of this piece, does not have many lyrics. Rather it consists mostly of chants invoking the saint, Sidi Musa, to which the Gnawa brotherhood traces its lineage. Further into the song, the dancers go into a choreographed dance before El Gourd

⁵⁹ The New School, "The Gnawa: Abdellah El Gourd and Randy Weston Full Performance," YouTube video, 2015.

⁶⁰ Maisie Sum, *Music of The Gnawa Of Morocco: Evolving Spaces and Times*. (The University of British Columbia, 2012), 138.

rises to dance along with them and Weston moves towards the piano. The group continues and ends with the guembri on a sustained note, which Weston picks up by playing a rubato solo piano introduction to the song. He incorporates blues notes, which are not in the pentatonic scale but are possibly an attempt to play notes that are close to the guembri and Gnawa style of playing which is not directly connected to Western modes of playing. Weston's left hand plays in the low register and mostly two notes at a time, while his right hand plays heavily accented single lines with other chord tones at times. He creates pedal movements while seeming to riff at that moment. The scale he plays his melody consists of G-A-B-D-E, which is a difference of one note the C to B from El Gourd's interpretation. There are also stylistic differences in the accents. Weston plays Monk-like two note harmonies, which consists of notes half a step apart that he incorporates into the melody. Although not audible, El Gourd visibly joins in on the tune with

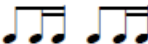
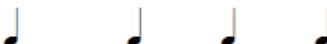
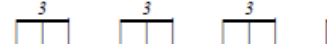
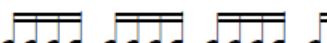
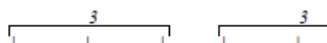
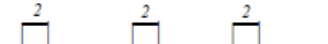
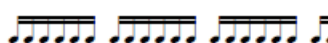
1. qraqab - regulating pulse - strict ostinati	Q1 	Q2 
2. guembri - motives usually 2, 4, 8, or 16 pulses long - varying motives	E.g. 4-pulse period simple $\frac{4}{4}$      frequent:  rare: 	E.g. 4-pulse period compound $\frac{12}{8}$        

Figure 1 Sum's Overview of (Gnawa) Rhythmic Elements

Weston and the other musicians do so after Weston plays the opening melody twice. The krakeb

players create a similar rhythmic motif that consists of two sixteenth-notes, and two eighth notes all played twice within a six-beat cycle (see Figure 1). After Weston and the krakeb players play for a bit, El Gourd joins them. Following this, two of the krakeb players put their instruments down and signal the audience to clap three syncopated eighth notes before they go into more physical dancing. Eventually, they pick up their krakebs again and join the other musicians and finish the song. This thirteen-and-a-half-minute performance seems to be a truncated version of what one would experience in a local Lila in Morocco. Weston's "Blue Moses" was able to preserve the Gnawa song's fluidity between duple and triple meter, its strong pentatonic foundation, as well as the call and response elements found in this tradition. Another important quality to Weston's rendition is its danceability, which is important since the original serves to take an audience participant into a trance and heal them through movement of energy within the body.

ASCAP lists two hundred thirty compositions by Weston. There are two entries one is "Ganawa," and the other is "Blue Moses Ganawa." The first song lists him as one of two composers with the second one being unknown with ASCAP controlling 25% of the song. The second song lists him as the only writer with ASCAP controlling 50% of the song. It is unclear from ASCAP's database if Weston has designed a way to give some royalties to the Gnawa for this inspiration from their repertoire. In the New School talk, he does not discuss how much of the melody comes from him and how much comes from the original Gnawa "Sidi Musa." Although it is not the focus of this paper, issues of intellectual property and cultural rights come to mind. Weston claims that he did eventually receive permission from a chief to perform the song and that he did not have intentions to commercialize it but that it needed to be heard by a greater audience. We cannot determine at this point, whether Weston took further steps to use

contracts or accounts to benefit the Gnawi for their permission to use part of their musical culture as the base for one of his most profitable projects. What we do know is that Weston hires them often and for at least thirty years has included Gnawa musicians on many of his tours and during his residencies, he had done at the New School, NYU, and Columbia University. And he has maintained a friendship with El Gourd for forty-nine years. Weston states that even after nearly five of decades from his introduction to Gnawa music he knows very little since it comes from a long tradition that connects the music to plants, animals, the universe, and a myriad of natural phenomena.

As Mantle Hood stated in a 1992 conference⁶¹, most music can be identified by a two-second sound sample despite similar instrumentation between different genres. Gnawa music has a recognizable footprint but when in the context of El Gourd's group performance of "Sidi Musa" along with Weston one may be hard pressed as to whether it belongs in traditional Gnawa music or jazz fusion. Without knowledge of Gnawa and jazz music's musical overlap and shared ancestral experiences among current day practitioners of both genres perhaps the question could be oversimplified, and one could arrive at a conclusion that is ill-formed. Norman C. Weinstein states in *A Night in Tunisia* that there is a "mutuality of [this] musical relationship between Africa and the African diaspora."⁶² It is not as some scholars have imagined where Western musicians are always looking at solely economic gains as the end result of their collaborations with 'Third World' musicians.

⁶¹ Giorgio Adamo Rom, "Single Tone Colour And The 'Sound' Of Music Items Some Remarks on The Qualitative Aspects In Music Perception," 2011, 150.

⁶² Norman Weinstein, *A Night In Tunisia: Imaginings Of Africa In Jazz*, (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 177.

In *Traveling Spirit Masters*, Deborah Kapchan states that “discourses of history and race are reconfigured through collaboration with Weston and Abdellah El Gourd.”⁶³ As a marginalized group in Moroccan culture, the Gnawa who are descendants of slaves had to use various means to preserve part of their identity and elements of their culture that vary from Arab traditions from a time before their ancestors were forcefully removed from their lands. Music and trance are tools that help to heal the psyche of the Gnawa while in an environment that does not fully acknowledge or discuss in depth these tragic historical events. Chouki El Hamel in *Black Morocco* reveals that there is not much scholarship on the history of slavery in Morocco.⁶⁴ This is due to a lack of slave narratives like the ones that exist in the Western hemisphere as well as a lack of consistency in abolitionist movements⁶⁵ in Morocco. Oral history and music have always been the default for retaining and transmitting cultural information within the African Diaspora. Weston and Gnawan musicians participate in racial imagination, rehistoricization, and transculturation through their collaborative work.

Looking at Weston’s work with the Gnawa reveals his openness and willingness to reclaim his African heritage and identity which eventually facilitated his entry into Gnawan culture. Also, unlike many musicians, Weston was willing to engage with various State and community organizations to further his mission to share knowledge of African music’s connection to global music including jazz. He was a devoted student of African music, not only of its rhythms and melodies but of various histories and cultural practices connected to it. Weston whose collaborations with the Gnawa have gone beyond a musical one, has become part of the community there creating memories for many of the citizens and part of the lore of

⁶³ Kapchan, *Traveling Spirit Masters*. 5

⁶⁴ Hamel, *Black Morocco*, p7.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p6.

Morocco. Developing his career and position in the jazz world, he was able to invite Gnawa musicians to perform with him which helped them gain exposure and opportunities to collaborate with other musicians such as Archie Shepp and Ornette Coleman. Weston's half-century relationship with the Gnawa has allowed him to take Gnawa and jazz to new heights.

Conclusion

Until recently, Gnawa music had only been written about in regards to its musical processes, instrumentation, and aesthetics. Most of the literature focused on Gnawa sacred ritual, but little was found on secular practices. Due to the recent popularity of Gnawa music in major cities, there has been new academic interest in Gnawa fusion music such as Gnawa-Reggae, Gnawa-Rock, and Gnawa-Jazz. Studying individual jazz musicians working with the Gnawa helps to bring awareness to issues that affect groups that they belong to. Researching the fusion of jazz and Gnawa music takes the myopic focus away from purist studies that only address music and artists that conform to their expectation of the genres. The collaboration discussed here is not formulaic and much is gained by looking at the music and how these players create. As Weston explained to a Malika Zarra, an American-Moroccan singer whose album joins jazz vocals and Gnawa rhythms, when he worked with the Gnawa he was participating in a dialogue between different parts of African music⁶⁶. He was not intending to improve it but was having a real exchange with fellow musicians whom he saw as brothers.

Weston's and Sanders' performances elucidate the parallels between themselves and the Gnawa. These jazz masters and Gnawa masters have been discriminated, marginalized, and pigeonholed. Despite these obstacles, both have been able to touch audiences and propel themselves and their listeners beyond everyday life through music. Weston has bonded with the spirits of the Gnawa and the entire culture. He has made Gnawa music his own. Sanders went inside Gnawa music and what came out of his horn was connected to the human aspect that crosses all cultural boundaries. All the qualities that Coltrane saw in Sanders were needed and put to good use when collaborating with the Gnawa. The path that both jazz masters set shows us

⁶⁶ Hisham D. Aidi, *Rebel Music: Race, Empire, and the New Muslim Youth Culture: Race, Empire, and the New Muslim Youth Culture*, (New York: Vintage, 2014), 137.

that whether one is looking inward or outward what matters most is the connection that can only
me made by those that can see and hear.

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