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California's Composer Laureate: Gerald Wilson, Jazz Music, and Black-Mexican Cultural Connections

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## California's Composer Laureate

Gerald Wilson, jazz music, and  
Black-Mexican connections

California should create a Composer Laureate position, and Gerald Wilson is the obvious choice.<sup>1</sup> The ninety-five-year-old jazz master has contributed to California's cultural and musical life, as composer, trumpeter, bandleader, teacher, and mentor for decades. Wilson's fusion of African American, Mexican, and other Latin musical traditions links us to the history of our racially rich, ethnically diverse state, and his life story could inspire one possible future of fully funded public arts education, which could someday serve as a model for the rest of the country.

Jazz, according to historian Eric Porter, "is a hybrid cultural practice, with African, European, Latin American, and North American cultural roots . . . [and] a vehicle for identity formation and self-actualization for members of disparate cultural communities."<sup>2</sup> The music of Gerald Wilson provides ample evidence proving this point.

Like jazz itself, Wilson's music balances the collective and the individual, arranging many voices together to realize a composer's vision while enabling a soloist's self-expression. His stirring instrumentals, which pioneered the Hammond B-3 electronic organ in a jazz orchestra format, are emotionally moving, like gospel church songs, as suggested by the reviews of his 1960s albums ("glorious"), Central Avenue Jazz Festival performances ("sheer ecstasy"), music ("soul satisfying"), and musicians ("Preaching the Sermon").<sup>3</sup> Wilson's big band causes happiness, brings joy, and produces beauty, whether loud and dramatic, soft and romantic, or moody and sensitive. His spiritual, soulful compositions, with their funky rhythmic grooves, touching love themes, and layered orchestral harmonies, conjure blissful soundscapes. His dense, rapturous surround sound is dignified, at times thunderous. Finally, Wilson's singular soul jazz reveals the drive and dedication of a disciplined artist—both student and teacher—who honed his craft and, through the rigors of intensive study, constant

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Gerald Wilson, with sunglasses. Photographer: Fred Seligo.  
Inner gatefold cover, Gerald Wilson Orchestra, *The Golden Sword:  
Torero Impressions in Jazz* (Pacific Jazz Records, 1966).  
COURTESY OF ANTHONY MACÍAS.

practice, professional competition, and passionate performance, pushed and expanded his talents over time, as part of his educational and musical philosophy.

### The best-kept secret

The recognition of Gerald Wilson's achievements include six Grammy nominations, two American Jazz Awards, the Paul Robeson Award, a Jazz Journalists Association award, a National Endowment for the Arts American Jazz Masters Fellowship, a White House citation for work with America's youth, winning the *Down Beat* International Critics Poll twice, and having his recorded life's work archived at The Library of Congress. He has conducted the American Jazz Orchestra in a retrospective concert, and the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band has performed his music. In addition, the long list of luminaries with whom Wilson has worked includes Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Dizzy

Gillespie, Billie Holiday, Dinah Washington, Sarah Vaughn, Carmen McRae, Nancy Wilson, and Johnny Hartman. Gerald Wilson is not a household name, but he should be. His talent is legendary among jazz insiders; his groundbreaking compositions, intricate arrangements, and immediately recognizable sound put him in a league of his own.<sup>4</sup> He has been revered by his peers, lauded in jazz journals (*Down Beat* called him "an arranger of international reputation" in 1962), and acknowledged in popular jazz music guides, dictionaries, and encyclopedias.<sup>5</sup> Alyn Shipton describes him as "one of the most accomplished and overlooked figures in jazz history."<sup>6</sup>

Although Wilson is mentioned in several academic and trade press books on jazz, particularly those on California or West Coast jazz, he is still too little known.<sup>7</sup> According to his friend and teaching colleague, jazz guitarist Kenny Burrell, "He never gets enough credit for all of the things he can do. He can compose and arrange for solo instrument and for full orchestra, and everything in between."<sup>8</sup> Wilson thus remained underappreciated—even underrated—by staying in Los Angeles, rather than moving to New York, but he gained other opportunities as well, and he reached his objective of writing anything—for the symphony orchestra, for the movies, and for television—with great speed, great accuracy.<sup>9</sup>

Wilson's big band stands out, though hidden in plain sight within the historical record, playing swinging, soulful music grounded in the African American blues tradition, and in the uniquely American jazz tradition. Moreover, an integral aspect of Wilson's musical legacy is that he wrote, arranged, recorded, and performed not only Latin-tinged tunes, especially several brassy homages to Mexican bullfighters, but also bona fide Latin jazz originals, including a couple of *clave*-driven gems.<sup>10</sup>

This essay focuses on the 1960s, Wilson's most prolific period, presenting a selective snapshot of his career, inserting him more fully into jazz—and California—history, and arguing for his continuing relevance, and for that of the arts and publicly funded arts education. Analyzing the influence of Latin music and Mexican culture on his creations not only reveals the black-brown connections in his Alta California art, but also highlights a hemispheric sense of Americanness that acknowledges a long history of indigenous and Afro-Mexican contributions to *las Américas*.

## Early training and career

Born 4 September 1918 in Shelby, Mississippi, and raised there by his college-educated parents, Gerald Wilson studied in the music program at Manassas High School in Memphis, Tennessee, then moved to Detroit, Michigan, to enroll in the racially integrated, cutting-edge music program at Cass Technical High School for five years, from 1934 to 1939. At Cass Tech, “it was music all day.”<sup>11</sup> Wilson recalled, “You learned symphonic music, marching band music and jazz. You had to take keyboard, percussion, harmony, orchestration, vocals as well as at least one stringed instrument.”<sup>12</sup> The rigorous public school’s curriculum included advanced instrumental techniques and music theory, resulting in expert training.<sup>13</sup> In short, at a time when highbrow, Eurocentric college music departments looked down on jazz, the music school at Cass Tech, with its two jazz bands, was, in Wilson’s estimation, second only to Juilliard.<sup>14</sup>

After playing with a few Detroit jazz groups, in an apprenticeship system that moved a musician forward as his abilities developed, Wilson joined the Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra in 1939 at twenty-one years of age.<sup>15</sup> Lunceford’s band rivaled that of Duke Ellington, and it played every capital city in the United States except one.<sup>16</sup> As Wilson recalled, “We were the avant-garde then, and we would have two or three hits going on the jukebox at same time.”<sup>17</sup> He wrote two original songs for the band, both of which became hits, and one of which, “Yard Dog Mazurka,” became a jazz standard, thereby announcing “a writer who brought a new kind of harmonic richness to big band arranging.”<sup>18</sup>

Wilson moved to Los Angeles in 1940, and after a state-side stint in the US Navy, returned there in 1944. After forming his first orchestra, he soon landed recording dates and a string of performances across the country, to much acclaim. In Los Angeles during the early 1950s, he played a key early role in the movement to “amalgamate” the city’s segregated black and white musicians’ union locals.<sup>19</sup> Yet even after he broke into the old boys’ network at the Hollywood motion picture studio orchestras, Wilson did not receive credit for his compositional contributions to films. As Horace Tapscott points out, even master writers were still getting “disrespected in the movie studios.”<sup>20</sup> Beginning in the mid-1950s, Wilson began a self-described “commercial period” during which, he stated, “I wanted to equip myself so that whatever kind of music my client wanted to

hear, I was capable of making it.”<sup>21</sup> Consequently, in addition to writing for shows in Las Vegas, he arranged material for jazz vocalists and pop singers, including several songs for the groundbreaking, bestselling 1962 Ray Charles album, *Modern Sounds in Country & Western Music*, and its follow-up of the same year.

## Mexican culture and the Latin tinge<sup>22</sup>

Gerald Wilson first tried his hand at Latin jazz in 1949 with his two-part arrangement of Chano Pozo and Dizzy Gillespie’s “Gaurachi Guaro,” and he wrote in the hip, Mexico City/Perez Prado style with his “Mambo Mexicana-Pt. 1 and Pt. 2.” Five years later, in 1954, Wilson’s arrangement of classical composer Aram Khachaturian’s song, “Bull Fighter,” boasted bravura trumpeting by Wilson himself, who summons a deep, driving groove, getting his vibrato matador mojo working, while inserting flamenco passages of the *pasodoble* march played when bullfighters enter the ring. Around the same time, in the mid-1950s, he arranged a flamenco-influenced tune, “Virgen de la Macarena,” for Duke Ellington’s orchestra.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, even before he first recorded for Pacific Jazz in 1961, Wilson had already begun writing and arranging Latin jazz, and by the end of the decade his compositions merged Latin rhythms with adventurous charts and a blues spirit. In 1960, Miles Davis and Gil Evans released the Spanish modal melancholia of *Sketches of Spain*. Meanwhile, by 1966, Cal Tjader had released numerous Latin jazz albums, Charles Mingus, *Tijuana Moods* (1962, originally recorded in 1957), and Herb Alpert, the pop party music of *The Lonely Bull* (1962), Herb Alpert’s *Tijuana Brass, Vol. 2* (1963), *South of the Border* (1964), and similar albums in 1965 and 1966. Wilson infused American music with his deeply personal interpretation of Tijuana brass by producing “a separate strain of jazz . . . based on the music of the . . . bullfights.”<sup>24</sup> The respected jazz critic Leonard Feather acknowledged

**His compositions merged Latin rhythms with adventurous charts and a blues spirit.**

Wilson's special affinity and "enchantment with Mexico, its music, its folkways, its mountains and bullfights, its gayety and majesty, and most of all, its melodic contours."<sup>25</sup>

In 1948 Gerald married Josefina Villaseñor, a Mexican American from Los Angeles who first met the bandleader backstage "as a fan of his, after one of his shows."<sup>26</sup> Josefina has been his lifelong guide to things Mexican, and she took him "to his first bullfight in Tijuana, where Wilson developed his deep appreciation for" the *corrida de toros*. Josefina thereafter remained a source of support and inspiration, connecting him with the bullfight, which became a special passion.<sup>27</sup> Mexicans, Wilson noted, are a very musical people; he learned to hear the sounds when he'd be there with the family; indeed, it became his other family and his other culture.<sup>28</sup> He suggested one way to bridge the divides of cultural authenticity when he remarked, "some of the numbers I write, you wouldn't think that a black guy had written this. But . . . [Josefina] had exposed me to the environment and I could hear it. I heard . . . such great music there in Mexico."<sup>29</sup> As Wilson told a Los Angeles disc jockey, "It's compatible with my heritage and background . . . My music is a reflection of my past and present surroundings."<sup>30</sup>

After repeated visits attending bullfights in Tijuana, he eventually befriended some of the top matadors in Mexico, and, Wilson said, "When I'd come in [the ring inside the *plaza de toros*], they'd all treat me like I'm part of the group."<sup>31</sup> Going back to the medieval Spanish origins of the traditional custom, true fans cheer not the bull's suffering, but the matador's poise, finesse, and elegance during a dexterous "dance with death."<sup>32</sup> Gerald Wilson is an honorary life member of "Los Aficionados de Los Angeles," one chapter of an "exclusive [US] bullfighting club" that gave Wilson one of their annual awards for his contributions "to the world of *tauramaquia*, the world of the bullfight."<sup>33</sup> One critic, after noting that the bandleader "developed a fascination for Mexico," even argued that "Wilson affected a Mexican persona; his on-stage and rehearsal demeanor with his orchestra is both commanding and exciting—not unlike that of a great toreador."<sup>34</sup>

### The 1960s Gerald Wilson Orchestra

Gerald Wilson's powerhouse seventeen-piece big band came strong with its 1961 album, *You Better Believe It!* and its smooth theme song, "Blues for Yna Yna," a laid-back,

down-home, head-nodding waltz in 3/4 time. It opens with an organ riff rippling alongside a sultry drumbeat and back-room bass line, then saunters off into a nearly seven-minute long conversation between the horn sections, punctuated by a trumpet solo, an alto saxophone solo, and a churchy jazz organ solo. A shorter version received steady radio airplay nationwide, and became part of a special *Down Beat* poll winners LP.<sup>35</sup> *You Better Believe It!* illustrated that "Wilson had already become one of the most distinguished composers and arrangers of his era," and ignited the fuse that set off an explosion of ten California-label Gerald Wilson Orchestra albums in ten straight years, eight on Pacific Jazz Records and two on World Pacific Jazz Records.<sup>36</sup>

The *Moment of Truth* LP strutted on the scene in 1962 with "Viva Tirado," a funky Latin jazz classic with a catchy theme, conga drumming, and jazz guitar written by Wilson in honor of José Ramón Tirado, a bullfighter from Mazatlán popular in Mexico and Spain during the 1950s and early 1960s, whom Wilson had been following for years in Tijuana. Tirado "was very brave and he did beautiful passes," Wilson remembers. The composer created the rhythm of the music to represent the matador's passes, the notes to capture his cape's movement.<sup>37</sup> Tirado "was sensational, had a lot of style" like a smooth jazz trumpeter, so Wilson tried to "paint" this thrilling young man "in music."<sup>38</sup> The *Moment of Truth* album illustrates Wilson's credo, "Both in life and music, I search only for the truth."<sup>39</sup> In addition to the title track's juke joint big band blues, the album also includes a tearing-it-up take on Miles Davis's theme, "Milestones," as well as "Latino," a *clave*-guided, blues-inflected Latin jazz original, and "Josefina," a romantic, cinematic jazz ballad that exemplifies the jazz master's quest "for simplicity—but not simple-ness."<sup>40</sup> In this regard, "Wilson's arrangements are never cluttered or complicated."<sup>41</sup>

A highlight of the 1963 album, *Portraits*, is "Paco," with its suave Latin syncopation, sinuously swinging, hypnotic horns, bluesy piano and guitar, and imploring, tour de force tenor saxophone. Wilson's arrangement brings to life his musical portrait of another renowned matador, the Spaniard Paco Camino, whose "new stuff" "was out of sight." As Wilson explains, "Bull fighting is not a sport . . . It's an art, continually evolving with new passes, new uses of the cape, new ways of confronting the bull, adding to the repertoire. It's very much like jazz. Paco was an artist. He improvised."<sup>42</sup>



TORERO  
IMPRESSIONS  
IN  
JAZZ  
GERALD  
WILSON  
ORCHESTRA  
THE  
GOLDEN  
SWORD

Gerald Wilson, cover close-up. Photographer: Peter Whorf. Gerald Wilson Orchestra, *The Golden Sword: Torero Impressions in Jazz* (Pacific Jazz Records, 1966). COURTESY OF ANTHONY MACÍAS.

This album also includes “Caprichos,” reflecting Wilson’s study of Spanish composer Manuel de Falla.

In 1963, the Monterey Jazz Festival presented modern music from Gerry Mulligan, Thelonious Monk, and Miles Davis, but Gerald Wilson, whom the writer Kirk Silsbee called “at the cutting edge of jazz orchestration,” earned a featured forum that weekend, and he “delivered an object lesson in the possibilities of big band music. Demanding time signatures, multiple key changes, intricate harmonies and, above, all, swing, were explored in a new and exciting way.”<sup>43</sup> To top off such an impressive year, in 1963 *Down Beat* magazine’s international critic’s poll voted Wilson’s big band number one.<sup>44</sup>

In 1965, Wilson released the album *Feelin’ Kinda Blues*, with big band covers of Herbie Hancock’s “Watermelon Man” and Miles Davis’s “Freddie Freeloader.” For his 1965 studio LP, *On Stage*, Wilson created “Los Moros de España,” a slinky Latin-tinged jazz number featuring the brilliant Mexican American musician from Watts, Anthony

Ortega, on alto saxophone, “Ricardo,” a vibes and organ swinger, and “Lighthouse Blues,” a relaxed, cool composition, as well as “El Viti,” an homage to Mexican bullfighter Santiago Martín, whom Wilson calls “a great matador, different from any other I ever saw. He never smiled, and he was tough. I tried [in the music] to trace a picture of him, as it gets down into a unique part where his stuff in the ring would get wild, but not overbearing.”<sup>45</sup> On “El Viti” Wilson uses two simultaneous time signatures, with the brass playing his patented eight-part harmony.<sup>46</sup> Originally written and arranged for Duke Ellington, this ballad showcases a poignant muted trumpet melodic line by Wilson, interrupted mid-song as Anthony Ortega leaps in whimsically, his alto saxophone solo twisting and turning from soul-searching to statement-making. The liner notes declared Anthony Ortega an “avant gardist” and “a new kind of jazzman.”<sup>47</sup> Likewise, a later commenter admired “the bite and pungency” of Ortega’s free jazz.<sup>48</sup>

## The bullfight continued to be a major inspiration.

The bullfight continued to be a major inspiration, and in 1966, Gerald Wilson released *The Golden Sword: Torero Impressions in Jazz*, regarded by many critics as the best of his orchestra's Pacific Jazz albums. On the red LP cover stands the bandleader, arms folded, symbolically surrounded by Mexican bullfight posters. Wilson's title track is a catchy Latin anthem that swaggers with dramatic trumpet brio and swings with soulful tenor sax lines.<sup>49</sup> After a jaunty, Latin-tinged version of the Broadway show tune, "Man of la Mancha," comes Cuban songwriter Ernesto Lecuona's "The Breeze and I," with congas, a Latin vibes solo, and Brazilian guitarist Laurindo Almeida playing flamenco. "Carlos" is Wilson's passionate, rousing tribute to Carlos Arruza, who was born in Mexico City to Spanish parents, began his career as a professional *torero* at age fourteen, became one of the most dominant modern matadors in the 1940s, retired in 1953, and staged a spectacular comeback as a *rejoneador*, fighting bulls on horseback. As congas and jazz drums lead the tropical rhythm, full-throated trumpet solos with Mexican *mariachi* phrasing weave into six other trumpeters blaring in unison, and in brassy dialogue with the trombones and saxophones. The tune became a requiem for one of the greatest bullfighters of all time when, four months after its release, Carlos Arruza died in an automobile accident.<sup>50</sup>

Wilson's up-tempo adaptation of Manuel de Falla's theme from the ballet *El Amor Brujo* exhibits vibes, congas, blasting trumpet and riffing sax sections, and a prancing, piercing double flute line by Anthony Ortega and African American Angeleno William Green.<sup>51</sup> Wilson's "Mi Corazon (My Heart)" sports Latin rhythm and a light-hearted melody voiced by the simultaneous flutes of Green and Ortega. "Blues Latinese" represents swinging Latin jazz, Gerald Wilson style, while his arrangement of a popular Mexican standard, "La Mentira (The Lie)," builds a *bolero* rhythm with congas and bass. Finally, the LP debuts two parts of an unfinished work, "Teotihuacan Suite," inspired by the ancient Toltec capital, with its pyramid and holy ruins, northeast of Mexico City: "The Feather" (straight-ahead swing) and "The Serpent" (rip-roaring hard bop).

In essence, Wilson created "big band music unlike anything else being heard at the time," and "the passion, the intensity and the drive of this music was unequalled."<sup>52</sup> Although the *Moment of Truth* album was named after the climactic conclusion of a bullfight, when the matador avoids a mortal goring while precisely plunging the steel *estoque* blade between the bull's shoulder blades, Gerald Wilson's love of Mexico and Mexican music coalesced in 1966 with *The Golden Sword*, named after a torero's highest accolade.<sup>53</sup>

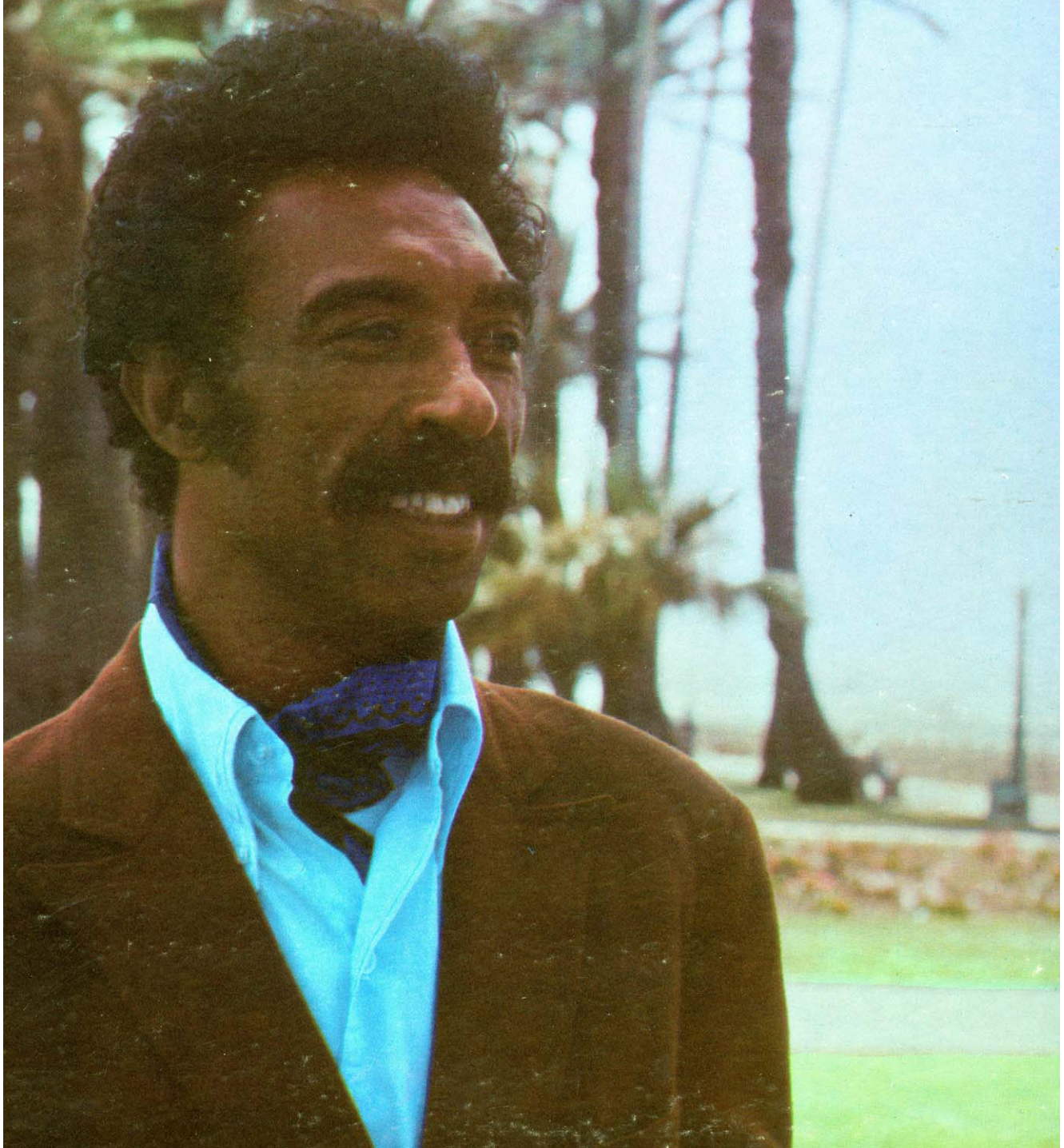
### The Latin connection

Wilson wrote a looser, more up-tempo arrangement of his most well-known bullfighter ode, "Viva Tirado," for the 1967 album, *Live and Swinging*, recorded at Marty's, a South Central jazz venue owned by a Mexican American Angeleno, with an all-black clientele. From the visceral Afro-Cuban bass line to the drummer's percussive cowbells, the pianist's block chords, and the rattling maracas in tandem with the scratching güiro, this live version's Latin musical elements added texture, density, and intensity. Three years later, in 1970, the Mexican American soul/Latin rock band El Chicano broke through into the mainstream with their organ- and conga-heavy hit cover version of Gerald Wilson's "Viva Tirado."<sup>54</sup>

Besides Wilson's impact on local Chicano musicians, his professional relationships with Latinos can be gleaned by the fact that he consistently hired them for studio recording sessions. For example, he contracted trumpeter Alex Rodriguez, alto saxophonist Ramon Bojorquez, *timbalero* Adolpho Valdes, conguero, *bongosero*, and trumpeter Modesto Duran, conguero Max Garduno, and the gifted saxophone, piccolo, and flute player Anthony Ortega. According to Ortega, "Gerald's writing kind of grabbed you. His chordal structures, the way he voiced chords in the background. He knew how to write to enhance the soloist."<sup>55</sup>

Ortega's versatile woodwind work can be heard on the 1968 LP *California Soul*, the cover of which, showing Wilson with a backdrop of tall palm trees near the beach, is credited to a photographer named George Rodriguez. Moreover, the inner gatefold cover frames an original pen-and-ink illustration by an artist named A.C. Rodriguez, a stylish juxtaposition of a Spanish mission and the Watts towers, divided by a winding freeway interchange, with mountains and an ocean bay behind, and a hot sun and seagulls above.

**california soul**  
**the Gerald Wilson**  
**Orchestra**



Gerald Wilson, cover close-up. Photographer: George Rodriguez. The Gerald Wilson Orchestra, *California Soul* (World Pacific Jazz Records, 1968). COURTESY OF ANTHONY MACÍAS.



The Mexican influence and Mexican American players continued on the album *Everywhere*, also from 1968, which includes a version of “Out of This World,” “one of his most complex arrangements,” replete with tempo changes, a Latin rhythm segment, and “the rich harmonies of Wilson’s ensemble writing.”<sup>56</sup> On “M. Capetillo,” Wilson “salutes Manuel Capetillo,” master of the *muleta* (red cape) from Jalisco, Mexico.<sup>57</sup> With this dedication, “Capetillo joins the honorees in Wilson’s gallery of bullfighting heroes. Wilson was in the stadium in Tijuana when Capetillo, the great *muletero*, fought his last bull on the eve of his retirement. The saxophones establish the bravery of his character, the trumpets the excitement of the contest.”<sup>58</sup> On side two Wilson hangs yet another portrait “in his toreador hall of fame” with the thoughtful, entrancing “Del Olivar,” “a tone poem with classical leanings.”<sup>59</sup> Wilson “paints a vivid portrait of the wonders and beauty of Mexico and the graceful movements of one of the most artistic matadors in the world, Antonio Del Olivar,” with Ortega’s “alto flute—warm, full of exuberance, examining every line of this beautiful theme with complete feeling and cognizance of Wilson’s every intent.”<sup>60</sup>

Wilson’s 1969 LP, *Eternal Equinox*, features his original song, “Pisces,” a sophisticated, wistful tune that turns on a dime into a triple-time bop burner via Anthony Ortega’s focused free expression on alto saxophone and Bobby Hutcherson’s furious vibraphone solo, before suddenly stopping, and effortlessly resuming the earlier moody melody. The Wilson original, “Scorpio Rising,” reveals a bebop disposition, a larger-than-life tone, and choice charts supporting Anthony Ortega on flute and an exciting solo by French jazz violinist Jean-Luc Ponty. Wilson’s “Celestial Soul” rocks a hard-hitting drum rhythm, tenor sax wailing in the cut, Fender electric bass, Richard “Groove” Holmes on Hammond B-3 organ, and a flute and piccolo refrain.

### Composer extraordinaire, role model, music educator

Gerald Wilson is “an innovator who crafts bold orchestral ideas that transcend style and era . . . whose work is perennially modern and, as Duke Ellington claimed, ‘beyond category.’”<sup>61</sup> In Wilson’s music, as John William Hardy wrote, “we feel the urgings of the negro spiritual and the blues tradition,” as well as “the ‘tough tenor’ school” and avant-garde jazz.<sup>62</sup> By conceiving colorful compositions

and fashioning crisp, intelligent, surprising arrangements, Wilson’s style enhances the sound of the musicians who play it, like Duke Ellington’s, while his rhythmic charts swung hard like Count Basie’s, “but allowed for more exploratory soloing.”<sup>63</sup>

Like Duke Ellington, Gerald Wilson is a righteous role model, and his deliberately noncommercial musical philosophy can be glimpsed in his 1947 decision to abruptly disband his popular orchestra at the pinnacle of considerable success in order to study further. The bandleader walked away from short-term financial gain in the form of lucrative guaranteed contracts to tour with Louis Jordan for fifteen weeks, record with Chicago’s Mercury Records for three years, and play the Apollo Theater twice a year for five years.<sup>64</sup> Instead, Wilson held himself to his own higher standard, followed his own long-term plan, and set his own priorities, thereby revealing his values and true character. Because he “never got into music for recognition or money,” he willingly sacrificed a higher salary by taking a sabbatical from the band business to meet his goals of further developing his orchestration and improving his skills, driven to “advance as a musician.” As he said, “I have studied all my life. I’m still studying.”<sup>65</sup>

He intensively analyzed the techniques of modern composers “who used advanced and sophisticated harmonics.”<sup>66</sup> His intention was not to imitate, but to broaden his approach to jazz, for as he sagely states, “I didn’t want to try to write like Beethoven or Mozart, but I needed to *know* what they did. Villa-Lobos wrote like Villa-Lobos and I, in my own way, wanted to write like myself.”<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, he eventually began composing classical symphonies, many by commission. For instance, in 1972, Zubin Mehta invited Wilson to compose an original symphony for the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, and he was subsequently commissioned to write four more symphonies for the LA Phil, accompanied by a 250-voice interdenominational choir.

Wilson, who has been called “the complete professional,” cautioned that jazz “is a very highly technical music, requiring years to develop the skills necessary to play it. There are no short cuts.”<sup>68</sup> Consequently, he insisted, “To be a professional, you have got to study hard . . . to practice and . . . stay on it because the competition is tough.”<sup>69</sup>

Wilson was both a student of jazz and a teacher. He taught a two-part survey course, “The Development of Jazz,”



Gerald Wilson, back cover close-up. Photographer: George Rodriguez. The Gerald Wilson Orchestra, *California Soul* (World Pacific Jazz Records, 1968). COURTESY OF ANTHONY MACÍAS.



# california soul the Gerald Wilson Orchestra

Gerald Wilson, inner gatefold cover close-up. Illustrator: A.C. Rodriguez. The Gerald Wilson Orchestra, *California Soul* (World Pacific Jazz Records, 1968). COURTESY OF ANTHONY MACÍAS.

for thirty-eight years at California State University, Northridge; California State University, Los Angeles; Cal Arts; and finally at University of California, Los Angeles. By the time he retired from UCLA in 2008 as an adjunct assistant professor, he had won the Distinguished Teaching Award, and his ethnomusicology lecture enrolled over five hundred

**You have got to be free  
so you can play and your  
goodness can come out.**

students, making it “the largest jazz class in the world.”<sup>70</sup> In the first term, students studied jazz history from ragtime through swing; in the second, from bebop to the present. While students learned “where jazz came from and when it came and who did it,” Wilson didn’t limit his teaching to music: “I want to emphasize the difference between right and wrong,” he said. “You’ve got to be a good person to play jazz. . . . You have got to be free so you can play and your goodness can come out.”<sup>71</sup>

Young people would be wise to follow in the footsteps of Wilson, whose later recordings, performances, and compositions are a testament to his talent. For example, his 1999

piece, “Theme for Monterey,” was nominated for two Grammy awards; his special 2007 album, *Monterey Moods*, was composed entirely of original tunes commissioned for, and premiered by Wilson at the Monterey Jazz Festival; and his 2009 eight-movement suite, “Detroit,” was commissioned by the Detroit Jazz Festival in honor of its thirtieth anniversary. He has remained productive late in his long, distinguished career, recording the following CDs: *State Street Sweet* (1993), *Theme for Monterey* (1998), *New York, New Sound* (2003), *In My Time* (2005), *Monterey Moods* (2007), *Detroit* (2009), and *Legacy* (2011).

### For posterity: cross-cultural confluence

There seems to be a perception among East Coast jazz critics and academic experts that other than 1950s white cool jazz, nothing of real importance happened in California. As a result, “Except for West Coast jazz . . . rarely is Los Angeles acknowledged as a setting that stimulated innovations or new developments. . . . Jazz artists native to Los Angeles (e.g., Buddy Collette) or those who migrated and permanently settled in the city (e.g., Horace Silver) have been recognized but seldom are featured or highlighted in jazz scholarship.”<sup>72</sup> One Los Angeles trained scholar and jazz pianist, bandleader, and composer blames California for Wilson’s relative lack of renown: “Perhaps the lack of recognition is directly attributable to his long residence in Southern California” since “other than West Coast jazz, all innovation is associated with New York City.”<sup>73</sup>

By another account, Wilson has been “often overlooked” by the “New York-centric jazz world” because he “never hit the road,” preferring instead to make “time to compose and enjoy his family,” and because he “never developed a taste for self-promotion.”<sup>74</sup> Perhaps the Manhattan intelligentsia—and some academics—did not understand Wilson’s references to Mexico and to bullfighters, did not respect his black and brown Angeleno musicians, or did not value his humility. Perhaps they perceived his style as too casual by East Coast standards, despite his use of the violin, the harpsichord, and especially the piccolo and the flute, two instruments that are rarely used in a big band.<sup>75</sup>

Any anti-California bias in the jazz canon reflects those who look west but analyze the wrong indicators. Gerald Wilson’s journeys, from Mississippi to Memphis, Detroit, and Los Angeles, as well as his early-career travels touring

cross-country, and his later sojourns into Baja California and other parts of Mexico support the argument that “jazz music has been influenced by America’s . . . values,” and by “dynamic cultural mappings and exchanges.”<sup>76</sup> Wilson’s narrative tells a tale of cross-cultural confluence and cooperation, as a continuation of what historian Gary Nash called “the hidden history of mestizo America.”<sup>77</sup> At heart, Wilson’s story is a California story, that of an African American migrant who moves out west, where he meets a Chicana Angelena, starts a family, creates a swinging jazz big band that hires unsung talent, and records and performs exclusively on the West Coast throughout the 1960s.

Wilson first fell in love with Southern California while on tour as a trumpeter with Jimmie Lunceford, when he dozed off in the orchestra’s sleeping car amid cold, gray winter weather but awoke to warm, sunny skies near San Bernadino. During the next thirty years, he would drive with his wife’s family from Los Angeles down to Tijuana, and he got to know Mexico well. Thus, Wilson’s decades-spanning body of work contains a Mexican strain, just as the first families who settled Los Angeles in 1781 were composed primarily of blacks, mulattos, mestizos, and Indians; just as the unprecedented 1947 California Supreme Court case that invalidated the state’s anti-miscegenation law revolved around a black male and a Mexican American female married couple. Of his unique style, Wilson declared, “It’s meaty, it’s deep, and it’s rooted in the history of black and Mexican people.”<sup>78</sup> Indeed, Wilson’s savory songbook consistently absorbed Mexican flavors.

A case in point is Wilson’s 1981 album, *Lomelin*. After a recording hiatus during the 1970s, the bandleader returned with a new big band for the 1980s, and Leonard Feather warmly welcomed back “the individuality of Gerald Wilson, the pervasive sense of drama, the creative force that surges through his every chart.”<sup>79</sup> The title track is the final Wilson original in honor of a matador, in this case a triumphant, tragic Mexican figure from Acapulco named Antonio Lomelin. Like each of the toreros honored by Wilson, Lomelin represents the complex cultural significance of *la fiesta brava* (the brave festival), the ritualistic, blood-and-sand spectacle of men conquering fear and dodging death by dominating one-ton rampaging beasts. Like a bullfighter making a poetic pass, Wilson captured the artistry, gallantry, and grace of the *corrida de toros*, with “Lomelin” featuring trademark “emotional” trumpet solos.<sup>80</sup> Once again,

“Gerald’s two consuming passions, for music and the *corrida*,” were “magnificently welded,” and his “skill in the blending of Mexican and jazz rhythms and colors” was on display.<sup>81</sup>

### Race, the state, and the arts in California

Wilson’s cross-cultural bullfighter songs are symbolic, considering the influence of Mexican and Mexican American culture in California, despite a history of anti-Mexican legislation based on public sentiment, such as the 1855 Greaser Act, which punished any unemployed Mexican as a “vagrant,” and the Sunday Law, which banished *Californio* horse races, cockfights, and bullfights. From the early 1930s’ Mexican deportation campaigns to the early 1990s’ Proposition 187, California continually faced a supposed Mexican problem. While government officials and college brochures tout the state’s diversity, Gerald Wilson’s life story *embodies* the race mixing that has marked California since its pre-statehood inception, and reflects the changing demographic face of California, from Governor Ronald Reagan to Governor Pete Wilson, from Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley to Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. Wilson’s life, career, and musical compositions illustrate the promise of pluralism in California, and its potential to bring people together via the arts. Lest we too optimistically assess California’s neoliberal multiculturalism, keep in mind that its black and brown youths are being confined to the state’s poorest public schools and warehoused in its increasingly privatized prison industry at numbers disproportionate to their percentage in the population.

African Americans and Latinos/Latinas have often been at odds in the ongoing aftermath of economic restructuring, particularly as Latino immigrants achieve numerical majorities in previously black neighborhoods. Contentious conflicts between the two groups flared up throughout the nation, from Florida to North Carolina, New Jersey, Illinois,

Nevada, and California during 2004 and 2005. As detailed in two reports by the Southern Poverty Law Center, black versus brown fights broke out in California high schools in Rialto, Oakland, San Jacinto, and, in Los Angeles, at Crenshaw, Manual Arts, Jordan, and Jefferson high schools. Worse, since 1995 Latino gang members throughout Los Angeles city and county have been engaging in antiblack violence, especially aimed at African Americans moving into older barrios. As recently as 2006, Latino gangs were involved in hate crimes against African Americans in Carlsbad and Fresno.<sup>82</sup> Gerald Wilson’s 1960s albums and his Mexican and Mexican American connections can lend historical perspective to, but will not necessarily help improve contemporary black-brown relations; nevertheless, these two groups will remain key players in the future of California, particularly within the continuing context of a post-civil rights backlash.

A pragmatic prognosis, neither utopian nor dystopian, might suggest that for all its problems, California will continue to represent diversity and multiple perspectives.<sup>83</sup> Gerald Wilson’s musical recordings and performances facilitated this process, and shedding light on his 1960s output and his connections to Mexican culture reveals new chapters in a black-brown hidden history, questioning why quintessential California styles—even beyond jazz—do not earn respect. As artist and LACMA curator emeritus Howard N. Fox notes, regarding “the mythic exoticism of California . . . in the popular imagination” as seen in a *Time* magazine cover story, by the end of the 1960s the state had become “the hothouse for [America’s] most rousing fads, fashions, trends, and ideas.” One of these included “the free and easy California lifestyle, a notion of ample time and space, in which casually clad folks go about their business at a leisurely pace.”<sup>84</sup>

Historian James Gregory challenges “California’s claim to uniqueness,” arguing, “The state’s transcendent cultural

**Black versus brown fights broke out in California high schools in Rialto, Oakland, San Jacinto, and, in Los Angeles, at Crenshaw, Manual Arts, Jordan, and Jefferson high schools.**

traditions, in particular, its capacity for innovation and change” is more “myth than . . . fact.”<sup>85</sup> In contrast, other historians contend that “California has long been a seedbed of experimentation and innovation,” and that it “serves as a window on the future, both reflecting and anticipating powerful social forces that will profoundly affect the nation as a whole.”<sup>86</sup>

Whether or not you agree with notions of California’s exceptionalism, in which the Golden State is a forerunner or predictor of future trends, there remain “serious questions about whether Californians still have the creativity to deal with the difficult challenges of living in a complex, fast-paced, trend-setting, multiethnic state,” and to find solutions for the most pressing problems confronting the state today.<sup>87</sup>

Journalist and author Peter Schrag investigates “California not as promise but as the embodiment of the American future—the dream made flesh.”<sup>88</sup> Schrag disagrees with Carey McWilliams’s famous description of California as the great exception, citing the busts that inevitably follow the booms, and the social ills and economic strife that have marred utopian visions, but, he acknowledges, “it sometimes did a lot of things better (or at least did them first).”<sup>89</sup> State librarian emeritus Kevin Starr, whose seven-volume history is collectively called *Americans and the California Dream*, argues that the United States has always looked at California “as a bellwether state,” one which proves that “Americans of every cultural background can learn to live with and more importantly to respect each other.”<sup>90</sup>

Throughout his life, Gerald Wilson gave—and received—respect, and, like California, he is iconoclastic and inspiring. A Wilson retrospective is timely and relevant, as it raises larger implications for, and connections to, contemporary California, delves deeper into African American–Mexican American relations, and highlights the importance of publicly funded music programs. Although Wilson’s high school training occurred in Detroit, comparable programs could once be found in black and brown South Los Angeles high schools like Jefferson and Jordan, which produced some of the bandleader’s Pacific Jazz players. Telling Wilson’s story helps us appreciate the power of the arts, the necessity of arts education, and the efficacy of professional caliber musical training, offered for free, available to all Californians.

For these and other reasons, Gerald Wilson should be named California’s Honorary Composer Laureate, just as classical composer Roy Harris was proclaimed the Honorary Composer Laureate of the State of California late in his life, during the late 1970s. Bestowing this title on Gerald Wilson could raise awareness and generate discussion about establishing a formal, official appointment with a two-year term, modeled after the state Poet Laureate position. The first California poet laureate was named in 1915, but this unofficial lifetime title became an official position, established by an Assembly bill, in 2001. Under the management of the California Arts Council, electronic applications are reviewed by a panel of experts, who then meet in person to evaluate the top files, ranking them according to four criteria, and sending the top three candidates to the Governor’s office for additional vetting. After the Governor makes the final selection, the newly named California Poet Laureate must be confirmed by the state Senate and, if approved, is limited to two terms. The California Poet Laureate’s “mission is to advocate for the art of poetry in classrooms and boardrooms across the state . . . to educate all Californians.” During a two-year term, the Poet Laureate “provides six public readings in urban and rural locations across California, educates civic and state leaders about the value of poetry and creative expression, and undertakes a significant cultural project, with one of its goals being to bring poetry to students who might otherwise have little opportunity to be exposed.”<sup>91</sup>

The city of Los Angeles created an official poet laureate position, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic has a composer laureate position, as do the states of Connecticut, Missouri, and Arkansas, but not California. Creating a Composer Laureate position comparable to the California Poet Laureate appointment would make a statement about the significance of the arts. One of California’s previous Poet Laureates was Al Young, an African American. Our current Poet Laureate is Juan Felipe Herrera, the son of migrant farm workers, Professor and Chair of the Creative Writing Department at the University of California, Riverside, and former National Endowment for the Arts fellow, with a bachelor’s degree from UCLA, a master’s from Stanford University, and a master’s of fine arts from Iowa University. He is also an actor, artist, playwright, photographer, musician, and an activist on behalf of migrant and indigenous communities, and at-risk youth. Naming Gerald Wilson as Honorary

## He kept his band loose, not tight.

Composer Laureate of the State of California would place his body of work in dialogue with that of Herrera, continuing a black and brown conversation that places relatively recent clashes between the two groups in a broader context, with the arts presented as one worthy potential path despite the socioeconomic devastation of deindustrialization, from which neither group has completely recovered, while stressing the contributions of Chicanos and African Americans.

Although, as historian Ramón Gutiérrez writes, “ethnic studies scholarship” has moved beyond “contributionism,” respectful recognition for excellence still matters.<sup>92</sup> We need cultural role models. According to Anita Allen, multiculturalism “requires affirmative efforts . . . to insure that the cultural perspectives, histories, and contributions of minority groups receive appropriate emphasis. It also requires efforts that aid the struggles of minority students to achieve up to their individual capacities.” In this conception, the multicultural ideal forwards “the role model argument.” Despite the risk of “stereotyping minorities” as positive, “perfectly authentic ethnics,” the everyday position of real-life role models like Juan Felipe Herrera and Gerald Wilson as teachers and mentors could help Americans view the national monolingual, universal, common culture from a hemispheric point of view, with California leading the way.<sup>93</sup>

By opening a window into a lifetime of black-brown dialogue, Gerald Wilson’s honoring as Composer Laureate would advance that discussion into the twenty-first century. It would also point toward California someday becoming, in David Theo Goldberg’s words, a *state without racism*, and hopefully augur a subtle shift in California’s “state personality, what the state ‘looks’ and ‘acts’ like, its very ‘demeanor’” and its “sense of identity, of character through culture.”<sup>94</sup>

Perhaps this symbolic signification smacks of wishful thinking, but what if Poet and Composer Laureate role models were coupled with a serious (re)commitment to publicly supported K-12 arts education, and to guaranteed funding for the community college, California State University, and University of California systems? The Firestone and Ford



Gerald Wilson, conducting. Liner, *Live and Swinging: The Gerald Wilson Orchestra Plays Standards and Blues* (Pacific Jazz Records, 1967). COURTESY OF ANTHONY MACÍAS.

factories will never return to California, but perhaps the public school music and arts programs will, in a gradual reversal of the post-Civil Rights socially conservative racial retrenchment, and the post-Proposition 13 antitax sentiment.

In the end, Gerald Wilson decided to stay in California for the higher quality of life, for the freedom to not only raise his children without grueling one-night concert tours, but also to live as an artist, further developing and fully expressing his style. In typical southern California fashion, Wilson allowed his musicians to express themselves with no hassles and no worries. Like Duke Ellington, he kept his band loose, not tight, such that “if you miss a note, or you goof, or you’re late, I don’t care.”<sup>95</sup> In contrast to the type-A, stressed-out ethos in American culture, Wilson’s nondisciplinarian, nontaskmaster leadership freed up and empowered his players. As a conductor, he contended, “I believe I can get more out of an orchestra.”<sup>96</sup> He certainly did his own thing directing the band in performance: “I *move*. I choreograph the music as I conduct.”<sup>97</sup> His unique conducting method let him feel “the emotional qualities,” he explained; “It’s through my body language that I bring about changes in tempo, coloration, and dynamics.”<sup>98</sup>

Wilson ever remains a consummate, innovative composer, a master of big band impressionism, a painter of tone and timbre. As with all his awards, Gerald Wilson is more

than worthy of the title, “California’s Composer Laureate,” of being honored for his genius, greatness, and outstanding achievements in the field of modern jazz, from San Francisco, where he lived and performed for two years, to Monterey, where he appeared repeatedly, Hollywood, where he recorded with and recruited from the studio orchestras, and Hermosa Beach, where he played the Lighthouse Cafe. The maestro’s inimitable style could be called “California Soul,” but Wilson’s inspiration—and his worldview—is much larger than the Golden State. It is quintessentially American, like the jazz idiom he expressed himself in, and like the Mexican landscapes he immersed himself in, from Mexico’s bullfight arenas to its pyramid peaks. Refined in technique and form, Gerald Wilson leaves a luminous legacy as a gifted communicator, an inventive instructor, a charismatic conductor, and a splendid composer; touched by the muses, sanctified and soulful. **B**

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For their assistance in the conceptualization, research, writing, and rewriting of this article, I thank Daniel Widener, Robin D. G. Kelley, Connie Martin Rivera, Aaron Bittel, Maureen Russell, Carolyn de la Peña, Abby Wasserman, and the anonymous outside reviewers.
- <sup>2</sup> Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?: African American Musicians As Artists, Critics, and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), xvii.
- <sup>3</sup> Zan Stewart, “Gerald Wilson’s One-Two Punch,” *Down Beat* 64, no. 1 (January 1997): 32; Brick Wahl, “Gerald Wilson at the Central Avenue Jazz Festival,” <http://brickwahl.com/2012/03/28/gerald-wilson-at-the-central-avenue-jazz-festival/>; Jerry D’Souza, “Gerald Wilson: The Artist Selects (2005),” <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=19762>; Al Fox, KPCC-FM, Los Angeles, liner notes, *Live and Swinging: The Gerald Wilson Orchestra Plays Standards and Blues* (Pacific Jazz Records, 1967).
- <sup>4</sup> “Gerald Wilson,” <http://www.mamajazz.org/pages/biogerald.html>.
- <sup>5</sup> John Tynan, “Gerald Wilson: Facing Challenges,” *Down Beat* 29, no. 1 (4 January 1962): 18. See also Leonard Feather, *The New Edition of the Encyclopedia of Jazz* (Bonanza Books, 1965); Ron Wyn, et al., eds., *All Music Guide to Jazz: The Best CDs, Albums, and Tapes* (San Francisco: Miller Freeman Books, 1994); Leonard Feather and Ira Gitler, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Barry Kernfeld, ed., *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2d ed. (New York: Grove’s Dictionaries, Inc., 2002).
- <sup>6</sup> Alyn Shipton, *A New History of Jazz*, Revised and Updated Edition (New York: Continuum, 2007), 375.
- <sup>7</sup> Gerald Wilson is mentioned vis-à-vis hard bop and organ-tenor sax combos in Mark Gridley, *Jazz Styles: History and Analysis*, 9th ed. (Prentice Hall, 2006), is mentioned in passing once in Ted Gioia, *The History of Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), is praised as talented and stylized in Ted Gioia, *West Coast Jazz: Modern Jazz in California, 1945–1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), is praised for his trumpet solos with the Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra in Gunther Schuller, *The Swing Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), is mentioned in passing six times in Robert Gordon, *Jazz West Coast: The Los Angeles Jazz Scene of the 1950s* (London: Quartet Books, 1986), and is profiled in K.O. Eckland, *Jazz West, 1945–1985: The A-Z Guide to West Coast Jazz Music* (Cypress Grove Corp., 1986).
- <sup>8</sup> Kenny Burrell, “The Gerald Wilson Living Legends Music and Lecture Series, featuring Buddy Collette,” Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies, University of California, Los Angeles, 21 May 2009.
- <sup>9</sup> Jeff Sultanof, “The Dozens: Essential Gerald Wilson,” <http://www.jazz.com/dozens/the-dozens-essential-gerald-wilson>; Gerald Wilson, National Public Radio, *Jazz Profiles*, as quoted in Ramsey, liner notes, *Complete Pacific Jazz Recordings*, 2.
- <sup>10</sup> The *clave* is a syncopated 3/2, or, less often, 2/3 rhythmic pattern over two bars essential to many aspects of traditional Cuban music, including arranging, phrasing, and improvising. Played by striking a small wooden block, but often only implied, it establishes a framework or point of reference for various Latin rhythms. Wilson let his Latino musicians “take care of” the “percussion section.” Gary Walker, interview with Gerald Wilson, [http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article\\_print.php?id=2018](http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article_print.php?id=2018), posted October 2003. According to trumpeter Bobby Rodriguez, a Chicano musician hired by Wilson in the 1980s, “As opposed to . . . the Machito or Dizzy Gillespie approach . . . to the Afro-Cuban, Gerald approaches it from the harmonic sense.” Ramsey, liner notes, *Complete Pacific Jazz Recordings*, 7.
- <sup>11</sup> Walker, interview with Gerald Wilson.
- <sup>12</sup> John Norris, “Gerald Wilson: Moment of Truth,” *Coda* no. 248 (1993): 16.
- <sup>13</sup> Mark Stryker, “Still Swingin’,” *Detroit Free Press*, 29 August 2004, Entertainment Section, 3 M, Gerald Wilson Commercial Recordings and Ephemera, 2008.02\_Folder 01, Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles.
- <sup>14</sup> Marc Myers, “Interview: Gerald Wilson,” <http://www.jazzwax.com/2011/07/interview-gerald-wilson.html>, posted 20 July 2011.
- <sup>15</sup> Norris, “Moment of Truth,” 16.
- <sup>16</sup> Walker, interview with Gerald Wilson.
- <sup>17</sup> James M. Manheim, “Gerald Wilson Biography,” <http://biography.jrank.org/pages/2493/Wilson-Gerald.html>.



- <sup>18</sup> John Tynan, "Gerald Wilson," *BMI: The Many Worlds of Music* (March 1970): 20; Doug Ramsey, liner notes, *The Complete Pacific Jazz Recordings of Gerald Wilson and his Orchestra* (Mosaic Records, 2000), 1, Gerald Wilson Commercial Recordings and Ephemera, 2008.02\_ARCD, 673–677, Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles.
- <sup>19</sup> On the amalgamation of the South Central and Hollywood musician union locals, and Gerald Wilson's role in it, see Clara Bryant, et al., eds., *Central Avenue Sounds: Jazz in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
- <sup>20</sup> Horace Tapscott, interview by Steven Isoardi, 1993, #300/484, Central Avenue Sounds, Oral History Program, Department of Special Collections, Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.
- <sup>21</sup> Ramsey, liner notes, *Complete Pacific Jazz Recordings*, 3; Mike Joyce, "Gerald Wilson's Jazz Legacy: A Pioneering Band Leader Still Pushes the Limits," *Washington Post*, 5 June 1996, Style Section, "Spotlight" Column, C 7.
- <sup>22</sup> See John Storm Roberts, *The Latin Tinge: The Impact of Latin American Music on the United States*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). First published 1979. See also Raúl Fernández, *Latin Jazz: The Perfect Combination/La Combinación Perfecta* (San Francisco: Chronicle Book/Smithsonian Institution, 2002).
- <sup>23</sup> Leonard Feather, "Gerald Wilson," *International Musician* 62, no. 1 (July 1963): 45.
- <sup>24</sup> Kirk Silsbee, "Master Roots: Gerald Wilson Goes Time Traveling to Reveal the Sources of his Jazz Orchestral Genius," *Down Beat* (January 2006): 46, Gerald Wilson Commercial Recordings and Ephemera, 2008.02\_Folder 01, Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles.
- <sup>25</sup> Leonard Feather, liner notes, *The Golden Sword: Torero Impressions in Jazz* (Pacific Jazz Records, 1966).
- <sup>26</sup> Josefina Wilson, conversation with the author, "The Gerald Wilson Living Legends Music and Lecture Series, featuring Buddy Collette," Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies, University of California, Los Angeles, 21 May 2009. More than just Wilson's Mexican muse, Josefina is also the "copyist for the band." As Wilson explains, "We had to work hard for what we got, and she's done it all, and I'm very proud of her." Gerald Wilson, *Suite Memories*, disc 2, track #23, "Reflections."
- <sup>27</sup> Greg Burk, "Gerald Wilson interview," *LA Weekly*, [http://www.metaljazz.com/2006/01/gerald\\_wilson\\_interview\\_2004.php](http://www.metaljazz.com/2006/01/gerald_wilson_interview_2004.php), posted 17 June 2004.
- <sup>28</sup> Murphy, interview with Gerald Wilson.
- <sup>29</sup> Walker, interview with Gerald Wilson.
- <sup>30</sup> Al "Steve-O" Stevenson, KTYM-FM, Los Angeles, "A Telephone Conversation with Gerald Wilson," liner notes, The Gerald Wilson Orchestra, *Eternal Equinox* (World Pacific Jazz Records, 1969).
- <sup>31</sup> Walker, interview with Gerald Wilson.
- <sup>32</sup> Wilson's favorite moment of the *corrida* is the *indulto*, the rare pardon granted to spare a particularly valiant bull's life. As Wilson recounts, "The man has now won, and . . . all of a sudden he'll just throw everything down—he's on his knees, looking right at the bull. The bull is frozen." Burk, "Gerald Wilson interview." On the definition of "bullfighting as a type of dramatic ballet dance with death," see Mario Carrión, "The Spanish Fiesta Brava: Historical Perspective and Definition," <http://coloquio.com/toros/bullhist.html>.
- <sup>33</sup> On Wilson being an honorary life member of "Los Aficionados de Los Angeles," see Ramsey, liner notes, *Complete Pacific Jazz Recordings*, 5.
- <sup>34</sup> Robert Dupuis, "Gerald Wilson Biography," <http://www.musicanguide.com/biographies/1608000589/Gerald-Wilson.html>.
- <sup>35</sup> John William Hardy, liner notes, The 17 Piece Orchestra of Gerald Wilson featuring the jazz organ of Richard "Groove" Holmes, *You Better Believe It!* (Pacific Jazz Records, 1961), Gerald Wilson Commercial Recordings and Ephemera, 2008.02\_ARLP, 16854, Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles.
- <sup>36</sup> C. Andrew Hovan, review of *The Complete Pacific Jazz Recordings of Gerald Wilson and His Orchestra* (Mosaic Records, 2000), [http://www.allaboutjazz.com/reviews/11100\\_176.htm](http://www.allaboutjazz.com/reviews/11100_176.htm), posted 11 November 2000.
- <sup>37</sup> Molly Murphy, interview with Gerald Wilson, for the National Endowment for the Arts, [http://www.nea.gov/national/jazz/jmCMS/interview.php?id=1990\\_03](http://www.nea.gov/national/jazz/jmCMS/interview.php?id=1990_03), posted 25 October 2006.
- <sup>38</sup> Ramsey, liner notes, *Complete Pacific Jazz Recordings*, 5; Walker, interview with Gerald Wilson.
- <sup>39</sup> Hardy, liner notes, *Moment of Truth*.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>41</sup> Eliot Tiegel, liner notes, The Gerald Wilson Orchestra, *Portraits* (Pacific Jazz Records, 1963), Gerald Wilson Commercial Recordings and Ephemera, 2008.02\_ARLP, 16855, Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles.
- <sup>42</sup> Ramsey, liner notes, *Complete Pacific Jazz Recordings*, 7.
- <sup>43</sup> Kirk Silsbee, liner notes, The Gerald Wilson Orchestra, *Theme for Monterey* (MAMA Records, 1998), as quoted in Steven Cerra, "Gerald Wilson – Then and Now: Part 2," <http://jazzprofiles.blogspot.com/2009/07/gerald-wilson-then-and-now-part-2.html>, posted 15 July 2009.
- <sup>44</sup> Tiegel, liner notes, *Portraits*; Anatol Schenker, liner notes, *Gerald Wilson and His Orchestra, 1946–1954* [The Classics Chronological Series, #1444] (Classics Records, 2007).

- <sup>45</sup> Ramsey, liner notes, *Complete Pacific Jazz Recordings*, 8–9.
- <sup>46</sup> Kirk Silbee, liner notes, Gerald Wilson, *Suite Memories: Reflections on a Jazz Journey*, Collector's Edition, a spoken-word double album & scrapbook (MAMA Foundation, 1996), 10, Gerald Wilson Commercial Recordings and Ephemera, 2008.02\_ARCD, 669–670, Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles.
- <sup>47</sup> John William Hardy, liner notes, The Gerald Wilson Orchestra, *On Stage* (Pacific Jazz Records, 1965), Gerald Wilson Commercial Recordings and Ephemera, 2008.02\_ARLP, 16856, Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles.
- <sup>48</sup> Ramsey, liner notes, *Complete Pacific Jazz Recordings*, 8.
- <sup>49</sup> *The Golden Sword* title track evokes “the pageantry of the bull ring,” See Ramsey, liner notes, *Complete Pacific Jazz Recordings*, 10.
- <sup>50</sup> Feather, liner notes, *The Golden Sword*; Ramsey, liner notes, *Complete Pacific Jazz Recordings*, 10; <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/36192/Carlos-Arruza>.
- <sup>51</sup> Doug Ramsey argues that Wilson’s “Song of the Mad Fire” arrangement “is markedly different from that of Gil Evans for Miles Davis” on their “Will O’ the Wisp” from *Sketches of Spain*, and that Wilson “transforms Falla’s delicate theme of regret into a blues-like waltz.” See Ramsey, liner notes, *Complete Pacific Jazz Recordings*, 10.
- <sup>52</sup> Norris, “Moment of Truth,” 17.
- <sup>53</sup> Ramsey, liner notes, *Complete Pacific Jazz Recordings*, 10.
- <sup>54</sup> See also Oliver Wang, “The Journey of ‘Viva Tirado’: A Musical Conversation within Afro-Chicano Los Angeles,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 22, issue 4 (December 2010): 348–366.
- <sup>55</sup> Marc Myers, interview with Anthony Ortega, 13 January 2012, <http://www.jazzwax.com/2012/01/interview-anthony-ortega-part-4.html>.
- <sup>56</sup> Ramsey, liner notes, *Complete Pacific Jazz Recordings*, 12; Leroy Robinson, liner notes, *Everywhere* (Pacific Jazz Records, 1968), Gerald Wilson Commercial Recordings and Ephemera, 2008.02\_ARLP, 16860, Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles.
- <sup>57</sup> Robinson, liner notes, *Everywhere*.
- <sup>58</sup> Ramsey, liner notes, *Complete Pacific Jazz Recordings*, 12.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.
- <sup>60</sup> Robinson, liner notes, *Everywhere*.
- <sup>61</sup> Silbee, liner notes, *Suite Memories*, 1.
- <sup>62</sup> Hardy, liner notes, *On Stage*.
- <sup>63</sup> Schenker, liner notes, *Gerald Wilson and His Orchestra, 1946–1954*; Richard Cook and Brian Morton, *The Penguin Guide to Jazz on CD*, as quoted in Cerra, “Then and Now: Part 2;” Norris, “Moment of Truth,” 16; Gary Vercelli, “Gerald Wilson,” *Jazz Journal International* 41, no. 10 (1988): 12.
- <sup>64</sup> Ramsey, liner notes, *Complete Pacific Jazz Recordings*, 2; Silbee, liner notes, *Suite Memories*, 8.
- <sup>65</sup> Gerald Wilson, *Suite Memories*, as quoted in Stewart, “One-Two Punch,” 32; Silbee, liner notes, *Suite Memories*, 8–9; Bryant, et al., *Central Avenue Sounds*, 327.
- <sup>66</sup> Norris, “Moment of Truth,” 17.
- <sup>67</sup> Gerald Wilson, interviewed by Horace Mansfield, Jr., KPFA, 94.1 FM Pacifica radio station, Berkeley, CA, as quoted in Vercelli, “Gerald Wilson,” 12; Bryant, et al., *Central Avenue Sounds*, 336; Dance, “Genius at Work,” 5.
- <sup>68</sup> Dance, “Genius at Work,” 22; Norris, “Moment of Truth,” 17.
- <sup>69</sup> Fred Jung, “A Fireside Chat with Gerald Wilson,” <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=622>, posted 10 October 2003.
- <sup>70</sup> Murphy, interview with Gerald Wilson; The UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music, Department of Ethnomusicology, Spring 2008 Newsletter, 10; Stewart, “One-Two Punch,” 32; Jung, “Fireside Chat.”
- <sup>71</sup> Jung, “Fireside Chat.”
- <sup>72</sup> Eddie Meadows, “Clifford Brown in Los Angeles,” *Black Music Research Journal* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 45.
- <sup>73</sup> Dwight Dickerson, “Jazz in Los Angeles: The Black Experience,” *Black Music Research Journal* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 184, 190.
- <sup>74</sup> Stryker, “Still Swingin,” 3 M.
- <sup>75</sup> The piccolo and the flute were two instruments “you never heard too much in a big band.” Anthony Ortega, interview by the author, Encinitas, Calif., 10 August 2012.
- <sup>76</sup> Robert G. O’Meally, ed., *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), xiv.
- <sup>77</sup> Gary B. Nash, “The Hidden History of Mestizo America,” *The Journal of American History* 82, no. 3 (December 1995): 941–964.
- <sup>78</sup> Vercelli, “Gerald Wilson,” 12.
- <sup>79</sup> Leonard Feather, liner notes, Gerald Wilson Orchestra of the ’80s, *Lomelin* (Trend/Discovery Records, 1981), Gerald Wilson Commercial Recordings and Ephemera, 2008.02\_ARLP, 16861, Ethnomusicology Archive, University of California, Los Angeles.
- <sup>80</sup> Sultanof, “The Dozens.”
- <sup>81</sup> Feather, liner notes, *Lomelin*.
- <sup>82</sup> Susy Buchanan, “Tensions Mounting Between Blacks and Latinos Nationwide,” Southern Poverty Law Center *Intelligence Report* Issue No. 118 (Summer 2005), <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2005/summer/the-rift>; Brentin Mock, “Latino Gang Members in Southern California are Terrorizing and Killing Blacks,”

Southern Poverty Law Center *Intelligence Report*, no. 124 (Winter 2006), <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2006/winter/la-blackout>.

<sup>83</sup> Stephanie Barron, Sheri Bernstein, and Ilene Susan Fort, eds., *Made in California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900–2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2000), 27, 43, 44.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 193, 202.

<sup>85</sup> James N. Gregory, “The Shaping of California History,” in Sucheng Chang and Spencer Olin, eds., *Major Problems in California History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997), 17, 27.

<sup>86</sup> Chang and Olin, *Major Problems in California History*, 1.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, v, vi.

<sup>88</sup> Peter Schrag, *Paradise Lost: California’s Experience, America’s Future* (New York: The New Press, 1998), 27.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 51–52.

<sup>90</sup> As quoted in *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>91</sup> <http://www.loc.gov/rr/main/poets/california.html>; <http://www.cac.ca.gov/programs/poetlaureate.php>.

<sup>92</sup> Ramón Gutiérrez, “Ethnic Studies: Its Evolution in American Colleges and Universities” in *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1994), 164.

<sup>93</sup> Anita Allen, “On Being a Role Model,” in *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*, 181–82, 192.

<sup>94</sup> David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 2002), 244, 245.

<sup>95</sup> Wilson, *Suite Memories*, disc 2, track #24, “My Band Philosophy.”

<sup>96</sup> Dance, “Genius at Work,” 22.

<sup>97</sup> Terry Gross, “Trumpeter Gerald Wilson: Blowing Strong,” interview on “Fresh Air from WHYY,” National Public Radio, original airdate, 5 September 2006.

<sup>98</sup> Vercelli, “Gerald Wilson,” 13.