

many parts of the country, indeed of all the peoples and more that Wauchope Dyobha addressed. They had been recruited in their villages and locations, often bidden by a chief or headman to go and serve, in the tragically mistaken belief, fostered by the seven-year-old Union Government, that they would prove their loyalty to the new country and to the King of England by serving.

THE NEWS OF THE *Mendi* disaster was announced by General Louis Botha, the Prime Minister in Parliament in Cape Town and the whole house stood in silence as a mark of respect. But it did not go much beyond that. Some compensation was paid to those disabled in the wreck (and many were permanently harmed by exposure), others got nothing. The Union Government refused to allow war medals to be issued to members of the Native Labour Corps although a special issue of these medals to colonial troops

had been made by Britain (and the South Africans were singled out for praise by Lord Haig and others in France.) Mendi Day has long been accompanied by speeches by white administrators and "sell-out" advisory boardmen pointing out the loyalty to the Government shown by those who were lost with the *Mendi* and praising their discipline and obedience.

But the lesson of the *Mendi* was that sacrifice by the sons of Africa would not bring those at home recognition of their humanity in the eyes of their rulers. No doubt for many years men like Mqhayi still said of the *Mendi* "here is our blood. It is serving for us." If the *Mendi* is still to be remembered with honour, and next February will be the fiftieth anniversary, it will be for the courage of the men, for the glory they brought to Africa by their courage and calm, and for the prophetic call of Wauchope Dyobha, affirmed by the men he made it to, for the men of all those then very distinct tribes to "die like brothers . . . sons of Africa". ●

# JAZZ EPISTLE

# 7

CECIL TAYLOR:  
MOTION AND THE  
FUNDAMENTAL SOUL

LINDSAY BARRETT

CECIL TAYLOR IS A YOUNG Afro-American pianist and on the evidence of his very sparse but brilliant recording output, he is one of the most important musicians of recent years, and probably of this century. He is also wonderfully articulate and clear in his thinking. He has absorbed, and subdued without pretensions, technical methods and advances within the frame of modern Western music. But the most remarkable achievement of his playing is his virtual inability not to swing. Every note or half-note or crashing percussive chord cluster that he plays is rooted firmly in the tradition of the black experience. In other words the blues and its extensions are the vital beginnings and foundations of all his musical experience.

He is extremely gifted in transferring personal ideas to the open practical field of playing them, and his phrases are always clean and brittle when loud, and furry when soft. This quality of texture is evident not only in his phrasing but also in his sound conception. Juxtaposing them and setting them off constantly against one another with various tonal colours and related rhythmic changes he manages to produce an almost orchestral effect in his solos.

And when he accompanies other instrumentalists his music comes alive in a unique way, giving the effect of continuous motion to the piece being played. Instead of riding the rhythm or hanging behind it, his music exists within it and as a result he is always propelled by it in his playing. This is another subtle reason for his perpetual swing. The development of this overall rhythmic panorama in all his music is then a kind of gathering momentum. Is in fact the skeleton process of momentum. Under his fingers the piano murmurs, whispers, roars and rushes, a veritable river of sound.

CECIL TAYLOR HAS ARTICULATED the depths of his conscious social attachment to music in two talks with the critic Nat Hentoff and although both these talks were seven years apart his ideas remained remarkably consistent. "I am not afraid of European influences," he has said, "The point is to use them — as Ellington did — as part of my life as an American Negro." And again, speaking about his blues 'Luyah! The Glorious Step!' he said "I feel any jazz

artist who is important must be able to play the blues well, no matter in what style he plays it." To which one can only reply with a hearty and thankful "Amen."

AFTER CLOSE LISTENING it would seem that in terms of musical influences from the mainstream of the pianistic development in jazz, Taylor has appropriated on the one hand the technical virtuosity of Bud Powell and on the other the spare emotional rawness of Monk and centralised them into a musical form that is more traditional in voice than Powell and yet more modern in its use of virtuoso width and range than the music of the arch-traditionalist Monk. At the same time his percussive tendency is remarkably like Ellington's whose orchestral piano work he obviously admires.

But influences, it must be remembered are often unconscious especially when they only contribute towards the strengthening of a highly personal creative vision, and Powell and Monk may only be representative masters of two areas of pianistic history that he has digested in the historical whole. In this case, to Taylor whose originality and brilliance of concept (or vision) is outstandingly in the vanguard of his work, even the consequence of these influences and experiences in his music must be in part unconscious. This is so because he is a "living" artist, by which I mean that he is obviously driven by the actual motion of his work and in consequence he discovers new things constantly and feeds them back into the music that revealed them in order to root out even more revelations. In this manner his music is at times cerebral.

Or to say this even better, he is a genuine gutbucket pianist, and grass-root personality. His sophistication is the sophistication of the soul and the soil. And in this quality in his music is found the most remarkable kinship with the liturgical music of traditional West African religions and social ceremonies.

In fact having said this we can examine the surface technique of his music in terms of interweaving instrumental movement and there again we find similarities of concept between Taylor and the balofon orchestras of Guinea, upper Volta, Ivory Coast, and Ghana, among others. But again this is

probably unconscious since African traditional music has never been distributed in quantity in the West, and therefore to arrive at this point Taylor had to perform a kind of constructive destruction act in the process of confronting and learning the technique of Western Music. In other words, having acknowledged and understood the musical validity of Western musical technique, he has appropriated it as raw material and re-shaped it in the form of his personal and community desire and so created a new force. The extraordinary power of his achievement lies in the fact that this process is always audible in his playing.

IT WOULD NOW BE SILLY in examining the broader social implications of his music to say, as is so often said by the more condescendingly liberal of the white jazz critics, that Cecil Taylor is forging a new black image in America. He is doing nothing of the sort. He, like so many other great musicians of our race, is a product of an already strongly forged emotional image, common to universal human experience and most consistently developed to broader levels by historical black experience.

The implication that a new image needs to be forged for the black race in America, is not merely insulting, it is also a lie. In fact what is needed and what Cecil Taylor among others does supply, is a strengthening and revitalisation of ancient virtues. A renewal of ancient ritual rather than a creation of new ritual. It is the circumstance under which his particular vision of black experience is forged that creates the illusion of the renewal being new, but as the blues singer said:

*The blues ain't no stranger  
Oh yeah,  
They've been here before.*

And in any case the vision of the Afro-American experience that white America holds is not the vision that the community in general holds of itself. And it is the self-image which is most important in the vital life of a people. Cecil Taylor is in this way a pure artist because what he creates is drawn from a pure inner desire conditioned by a native rather than an alien standard. And just as Taylor works inside the rhythm

of his music so does his sensibility exist within the framework of the broad experience. This is the rhythm that is black.

AS A SOCIAL DIRECTIVE in the illustrative way, his music could be said to represent only motion and fundamental soul. If these virtues were fully employed in the black American community's life as they are in his music, there would be no question of the "new image." But this is not the teaching of the official American community attitude and so this could explain why there are not too many recordings of Cecil Taylor, or for that matter traditional African music, available in the West. Yet it is always dangerous to politicise an artist's product for it loses in that way much of its humanity and it is this humanity that is its strength. Cecil Taylor is a creator whose force lies in subjective moments of his creativity and these moments must be allowed to disseminate naturally and subtly into the wide area of the communal consciousness, and that takes time.

HIS BEST RECORD to my mind is the 1958 "Looking Ahead" (Contemporary M 3562), and yet I am tempted to think that the Candid Album, "The World Of Cecil Taylor" was an even more important breakthrough. The work with tenorist Archie Shepp on this album held a new grain of simple sweet beauty with harsh but sad overtones. In short a baring of the blues. But the company, Candid, went out of business soon after that record was released and so now it has become a rare collector's item. On the Fantasy Album, "Cecil Taylor Live At The Montmartre," (Fantasy, stereo, 86014), in spite of the absence of bassist Henry Grimes who had been his bass-player in the U.S.A. but who did not go to Europe with him, the extraordinary economy of his playing is the outstanding quality. Against the earlier Contemporary disc it illustrates a remarkable process of consistent and relentless thrust. But in spite of perpetual motion and momentum he does not sacrifice the fundamental soul and in so doing he makes the direction of his movement valid.

## One sweep of love

FOR THE SABOTEUR

*parched flames  
lap the sullen night sky  
blue of gaseous conflagration  
scarlet carnations  
spattered on fallen walls  
and the scent of roasting flesh,  
where they die;*

*no last word:  
only the hiss of lighted fuses  
desultory detonation  
wood cracking across fractured steel  
smould'ring into  
charred grotesqueries heav'nward turned,  
where they die  
hailing freedom with their parting breath.*

*their bones decay in unknown places  
banished from tear-hallowed graves  
by the greed in men's hearts:  
no heap of earth,  
no flowers;*

*there are no flowers  
where our heroes lie,  
but we'll gather their bones  
in one sweep of love  
and bury them  
where flowers bloom ever in numberless  
hues,*

*for this precious thing:  
freedom.*

MAKHUDU RAMMOPO