

BRIAN LYNCH BIG BAND



Hollistic MusicWorks HMW 20/21

THE OMNI-AMERICAN BOOK CLUB / MY JOURNEY THROUGH LITERATURE IN MUSIC
featuring **DONALD HARRISON / REGINA CARTER / DAFNIS PRIETO / DAVE LIEBMAN / ORLANDO "MARACA" VALLE / JIM SNIDERO**

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THE OMNI-AMERICAN BOOK CLUB

MY JOURNEY THROUGH LITERATURE IN MUSIC



- 01 CRUCIBLE FOR CRISIS 12:07
for David Levering Lewis and W.E.B. DuBois
- 02 THE STRUGGLE IS IN YOUR NAME 8:59
for Ta-Nehisi Coates and Albert Murray
- 03 AFFECTIVE AFFINITIES 8:04
for Ned Sublette and Eric Hobsbawm
- 04 THE TROUBLE WITH ELYSIUM 13:32
for Naomi Klein and Mike Davis
- 05 INEVITABILITY AND ETERNITY 10:05
for Timothy Snyder and Masha Gessen
- 06 TRIBUTE TO BLUE (MITCHELL) 8:33
for Isabel Wilkerson and Ralph Ellison
- 07 OPENING UP 10:14
for Nell Irvin Painter and Brené Brown
- 08 AFRICA MY LAND 11:09
for Chinua Achebe and Robert Farris Thompson
- 09 WOODY SHAW 8:44
for Amiri Baraka and A.B. Spellman
- 10 THE STRUGGLE IS IN YOUR NAME extended version 12:24
- 11 WOODY SHAW extended version 12:11



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Recorded May 2019 at **The L. Austin Weeks Center for Recording and Performance**, Frost School Of Music, Coral Gables, FL

Recording Engineer: **Chris Palowitch**
Additional Recording: **Red Rock Studio**, Saylorsburg, PA (**Kent Heckman**, engineer); **P.M. Records Studio**, Havana, Cuba (**Betty Hernandez Vidal**, engineer); **Hollistic MusicWorks Studio**, Miami, FL (**Brian Lynch**, engineer); **Bass Hit Studio**, NYC, NY (**David Darlington**, engineer); **Audio Beast Studio**, Elizabeth, NJ (**Erik Piza**, engineer) **Esplanade Studios**, New Orleans, LA (**Misha Kachkachishvili**, engineer)

Mixing and Mastering: **David Darlington**
Artwork: **Robin D. Williams**
Design: **Jamie Breiwick, B Side Graphics**

Brian Lynch plays **Yamaha** trumpets and endorses the **Lefreque Sound Bridge**.

All music composed and arranged by
BRIAN LYNCH (Hollistic Music BMI)
Produced by **KABIR SEHGAL** and **DOUG DAVIS**

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THE OMNI-AMERICAN BOOK CLUB

My Journey Through Literature In Music

Brian Lynch is a...reader. Of course, we all know him for his musical prowess, as this exceptionally gifted bandleader, composer, and performer has toured the world, delighting audiences with his compositions and creativity. On his many journeys, not only does he have his Yamaha trumpet but a marked-up, tattered covered book. A prolific book worm, Lynch has had a lifelong interest in American literature, with an acute fascination with prominent African American authors past and present such as James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, W.E.B. DuBois, Ta-Nehisi Coates, and Albert Murray.

That Lynch titled his album after Murray's *The Omni-Americans* (1970) is a testament to the late author's significance and well-deserved place in the pantheon of great American writers. This book is a collection of essays, which begins with an opening salvo: "Ethnic differences are the very essence of cultural diversity and national creativity." For far too long, Murray has been overlooked, yet his life-affirming commentaries and provocative essays on culture and society are insightful and evergreen. His writings have served as a foundational philosophy for the jazz intelligentsia and aficionados alike. That's probably because Murray was an ardent supporter and advocate for the blues and music that originated from African Americans. And because he didn't hold any punches: "The immediate objective of the polemics in *The Omni-Americans* is to expose the incompetence and consequent practicality of people who are regarded as intellectuals but are guided by racial bias rather than reason based on scholarly insight," wrote Murray in the introduction of his book. In other words, don't let smart, seemingly sophisticated people get away with intolerance. Indeed, Murray holds up a mirror to American society and calls out the powers that be.

In Spring 2019, over breakfast in Miami, Lynch and I discussed thematic ideas for his next recording project. We quickly discovered that we had been reading from the same "syllabus." We shared an interest in American biographies, histories, and other works that revealed the character of our country. A white American from the Midwest and an Indian American from the South had found an intellectual home in the writings of Murray and other African American writers, arguably because we identified as "others" in our chosen community. Lynch has been a veritable outsider, a non-Latino playing with the likes of Eddie Palmieri. And he has excelled in what began as, and remains in its centrality and essence, African American music. Being surrounded by people of many ethnicities and cultures, Lynch has realized the brilliance of Murray's observation that diversity is a source of strength. And this is the touchstone of The Omni-American Book Club, which draws upon many sources of inspiration. In sum, it's a musical manifestation of the American melting pot.

It has been a privilege to produce this album with Doug Davis for maestro Lynch. I hope that that Lynch's magnificent music inspires more to pick up the great works of America's past masters. By understanding some of these seminal voices, we'll develop an enhanced understanding of our nation and its people. Let's get on the same page and begin writing the next chapter of our country together.

Kabir Sehgal

Books have been an important part of my life for as long as I can remember, even before music emerged as my lodestar and life's work. As a child, reading was neither an unwelcome duty or merely an enjoyable activity for me, but a passion, and a means for me to come into myself while finding out about the world around me.

As my comprehension grew my reading interests became broader, and I sought out books that might help my young mind make sense of what was going on around me and in the society that I was going to live my life in. Books provided the context that formed a concept of who I was and wanted to be. Reading gave me the equipment to find a life for myself and discover how I should live it.

When Kabir Sehgal, in our discussions about the theme of this project, brought up Albert Murray's *The Omni-Americans*, my mind shot back to the day, so many years ago, I checked out that book at the Atkinson branch of the Milwaukee Public Library. I'm not sure where I had heard of this work, still fairly new at the time, but at the time I was devouring everything I could to find out about what was behind the music that I was in the process of pledging myself to. Murray's book, along with other volumes such as *The Autobiography Of Malcom X* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, "pulled my coat" to both what America was and what it could be. Returning to *Omni-Americans* again in the course of this project (it's part of the excellent *Collected Essays & Memoirs*) reinforced my admiration for Murray and his vision of what the country I live in - the nation the Omni-Americans made - could still potentially be.

I came of age in the 1970s, a decade bracketed in my lived experience by protest, cultural tumult and the hope of a transformed society at one end, and the arrival of a reactionary nostalgia serving rapacity and injustice at the other. Those two antinomies seem to have defined most of my time on this planet, and the days we now live in are marked by an intensified struggle between the oppositions of inclusion and exclusion, generosity and greed, love and fear, with the fate of the planet perhaps hanging in the balance. My reading, then as now, centers around a love of learning, a search for truth, and a passion for understanding why things are the way they are - and why they're not better.

The writers that I've chosen to pair with my compositions for this project are those whose work has a special importance and resonance for me in this particular time, whether I first read them many years ago or have more recently been exposed to them. The music of *The Omni-American Book Club*, beyond the specific dedications attached to each piece, is my heartfelt tribute to the many authors and myriad books that have changed my life and continue to help me make sense of this life on earth.

Brian Lynch

August 2019

The Omni-American Book Club / Track By Track

Illustrations by Robin D. Williams

Crucible For Crisis for David Levering Lewis and W.E.B DuBois

Track 1

Featuring Dafnis Prieto - drums and Orlando "Maraca" Valle - flute

Soloists: Dafnis, Maraca, Brian, Dafnis takes it home

I love reading history and I have probably read more history-related books, including biographies, than any other kind. David Levering Lewis is an African-American historian whose work has informed and beguiled me ever since I encountered *The Race To Fashoda*, his fascinating account of the rivalry of European powers in the Sudan amidst the "scramble for Africa" at the end of the 19th century. Both *Fashoda* and the later *God's Crucible* are examples of Levering Lewis's talent for narrating events and epochs in world history from a more informed, post-Eurocentric perspective. Levering-Lewis's multi-volume study of W.E.B DuBois (winner of two Pulitzer Prizes for biography) is not only a definitive life of this towering writer, philosopher and activist but a veritable history of African-American intellectual life from Reconstruction to the 1960s, the century of DuBois's long life. Reading Levering Lewis's biographies of DuBois brought me back to the work of the great man himself and a renewed appreciation of the importance of his thought.

Crucible For Crisis salutes the works of both authors by combining the title of Levering Lewis's book with the name of the NAACP's journal *The Crisis*, founded by DuBois in 1910 and edited by him for many years thereafter.

The Struggle Is In Your Name for Ta-Nehisi Coates and Albert Murray

Track 2 (extended version Track 10)

Featuring Donald Harrison - alto saxophone

Boris Kozlov - electric bass

Soloists: Brian, Donald, trades (on extended version: Donald, Brian, trades)



The dedication for this piece pairs the writer who inspired this project with one whose work I think is among the most important of our time. Not only does Ta-Nehisi Coates bring outraged clarity to the present state of the "American dilemma" - the culpability and hypocrisy baked into the DNA of a country that exemplifies freedom but was built and even now sustained by enslaved bodies - and he does so with compelling writing of the highest quality and style. His is the authoritative voice of the present era in what we call America, to my reckoning. The title of this piece comes from a sentence in Coates's *Between The World And Me*.

Affective Affinities for **Ned Sublette and Eric Hobsbawm**

Track 3

Featuring Regina Carter - violin

Soloists: Regina, Brian, trades, Regina takes it home

The dedication here is to two writers whose histories have informed and shaped my thinking over the years. My friend Ned Sublette's gift for research, synthesis and the placing of events in absorbing cultural context is demonstrated to great effect in his *Cuba And Its Music*. And his more recent *The American Slave Coast*, co-written with his wife Constance Sublette, is a definitive account of how the wealth of America grew from enslaved bodies.

Eric Hobsbawm, the English independent Marxist historian, has been one of my favorite writers for many years. His series of histories about the "long nineteenth century" between 1789 and 1914 (the era between the French Revolution and the First World War) are exemplars of trenchant analysis as well as of brilliant writing. He was also a committed aficionado of jazz music, writing of it knowingly and affectively.

The Trouble With Elysium for **Naomi Klein and Mike Davis**

Track 4

Featuring Dave Liebman - soprano saxophone

Soloists: Gary Keller (tenor saxophone), Lieb, trades, Lieb again; Brian, Alex Brown - piano, Kyle Swan - drums

Two books that upended my world during the first decade of the new millennium were Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise Of Disaster Capitalism* and Mike Davis's *Planet Of Slums*. Klein's gripping book is an account of how economic theory, turned into policy both public and private, has fueled inequality and a radical rollback of egalitarianism throughout the world over the last half century. Filling in another aspect of our present plight, Davis's book explains in exhaustive and horrifying detail how a great deal of the inhabitants of our planet now live, with an implication that the contingency of the global poor's lives cannot but extend to us as the world careens towards environmental disaster. Taken together, these books make it all too easy to envision a near future such as depicted in the movie *Elysium*, where the affluent few live in a giant space station - while the vast majority of humanity is left to a squalid, poisoned existence on a spoiled Earth.



Inevitability And Eternity for **Timothy Snyder and Masha Gessen**

Track 5

Soloists: Chris Thompson-Taylor - tenor saxophone, David Leon - alto saxophone, Brian, Hilario Bell - drums

The assault on truth and the efficacy of nationalist ideology in the service of kleptocracy - these are shared themes in the work of these two brilliant writers and public intellectuals. Gessen's absorbing *The Future Is History* is a chronicle of an opening and closing again of possibility in post Soviet Union Russia, written as the stories of individuals negotiating the rapidly shifting ground under their feet. Gessen is a Russian emigre to the USA who is all too aware of the implications of their experiences for the citizens of her adopted land.

Snyder is a historian with a towering knowledge of Eastern European and Russian history, and a writer of passionate empathy and humanity. His *The Road To Unfreedom: Russia, America, Europe* is a clarion call for today's world, connecting current events to historical antecedents and making evident the clear, present and plentiful danger. These books are both indispensable in explaining the pickle we are in as of the date of my writing these words.

Tribute To Blue (Mitchell) for **Isabel Wilkerson and Ralph Ellison**

Track 6

Featuring Jim Snidero - alto saxophone

Soloists: Jim, Brian

For this composition, named for a legendary jazz trumpeter, the dedication references two writers of different generations whose work has touched me deeply. Isabel Wilkerson's achievement in *The Warmth Of Other Suns* is to make the Great Migration - the epochal movement of African-Americans to the North during the 20th century - become vivid in the mind of the reader, through a skillful weaving of personal histories into a gripping narrative. The children of the Great Migration were my teachers and mentors when I was growing up in Milwaukee and coming into the music, and I recognized much, and learned much more, about their strength, perseverance and courage in the pages of Wilkerson's book. Blue Mitchell's own journey from Miami, Florida to New York City and Los Angeles to fulfill his destiny as a great musician is one of the millions of stories of this migration.

Reading Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* in high school was a crucial experience for me in impelling my consciousness of African-American and Omni-American thought. If there ever was an "Great American Novel", (the Holy Grail for mid-20th century American writers), *Invisible Man* was it! Ellison's essays and other writings have been constant companions for me over the years, read over and over again for their lucidity, elegance of style, and ideas. Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray were close friends and intellectual colleagues, and their letters to each other (many of them published in the Ellison collection *Living With Music*) are fascinating and quite illuminating of the way each influenced the other's work. I turn to both Ellison and Murray frequently in these days for succor, turning to old friends whilst reading with new eyes of a vision for America that inspired me almost a half century ago.



Opening Up for Nell Irvin Painter and Brené Brown

Track 7

Soloists: Alex Brown - piano, Tom Kelley - alto saxophone, Brian

The dedications here are for two very different writers, of very different areas of inquiry linked for me by the theme of vulnerability. Brené Brown's work on vulnerability, along with related concepts such as shame resilience, empathy, and courage, has become very important in my life as I grow towards my elder years. I rarely read "best-sellers", or anything that even remotely smacks of "self-help", but this is different - Brown's work, grounded in solid research and her own facility in translating it into clear and actionable messaging, gave me renewed hope for my personal liberation from the servitude of "not being good enough".

Vulnerability and courage are, to me, also important subtexts in the work of historian Nell Irvin Painter's *The History Of White People*. This book is an exegesis of how an ideology of "whiteness" developed hand in hand with slavery, and a chronicle of whiteness's rise, reign, and hopefully, fall. Coming away from reading this history, one realizes how artificial, self-serving (to the powers that be) and cooked-up the whole concept of whiteness is; as Ta-Nehisi Coates often terms it in his own work, it's all about plunder. For a thoughtful beneficiary of the skin lottery, reading Irvin Painter's book may result in a personal engagement with both vulnerability - opening up oneself to the inconvenient truth that all of us white folks participate in the plunder - and courage; to confront our privilege and actively find pathways away from it.

Africa My Land for Chinua Achebe and Robert Farris Thompson

Track 8

Soloists: Lowell Ringel - bass, Mike Brignola - baritone saxophone, Brian, Murph Aucamp - congas

The 6/8 bell pattern that is the rhythmic underpinning of this composition is employed throughout a wide swath of West Africa, including Nigeria, the homeland of novelist Chinua Achebe. His classic *Things Fall Apart*, a landmark of 20th century literature, was the book that first exposed me to the voice of African authors. Achebe's prose is clear and precise, severe in its economy yet exquisite in its quiet sense of feeling. His sensibility affects me deeply.

The writings of the eminent scholar of Afro-disaporic culture Robert Farris Thompson have been consistently entertaining and informative companions for me over the years. His books *Flash Of The Spirit*, *African Art In Motion*, and the anthology *Aesthetic of the Cool: Afro-Atlantic Art and Music* are all reliable guides to the cultural interconnectivity of what Farris Thompson calls the "black Atlantic"; an physical and cultural area that stretches from West Africa to Cuba and Brazil, the Caribbean and even New York City. Farris Thompson is a brilliant theoretician of the groove in all its forms, from sound and movement to pattern and even personal bearing.



Woody Shaw for Amiri Baraka and A.B. Spellman

Track 9, (extended version Track 11)

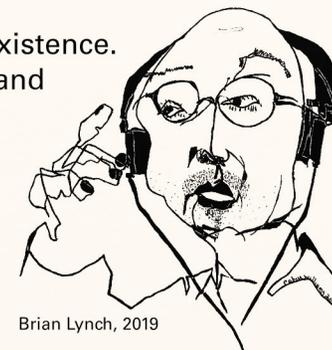
Soloists: Jean Caze - trumpet (extended version), David Leon - alto saxophone, Brian, Kyle Swan - drums, Murph Aucamp - congas

The final composition of this collection pays tribute to two writers that really lit my fire as a neophyte to the music and its culture. *New Yorker* film critic Richard Brody, in his appreciation of Baraka's work after his passing in 2014, described in detail how Baraka's work in the collection *Black Music* inspired him as a 15 year old aficionado of the jazz avant garde; indeed Brody reveals that Baraka's essays and journalism in that volume "...definitively set for me the template for critical writing and engagement". I was stunned. This was exactly the same experience I had, and at the same age (Brody and I are rough contemporaries). Brody writes of how Baraka "...wrote with ecstasy—highly informed and intricate—about ecstatically complex music. He also revealed literary and philosophical substance in it that gave form to my inchoate experience." I couldn't have described my own experience with Baraka's work better. His writing, a virtuoso high wire performance codifying the crucial importance of the project of black music, changed my life. It's very fitting that the big band rendering of my composition *Woody Shaw*, named for the groundbreaking trumpeter and fellow Newark native (Baraka wrote the liner notes for Shaw's 1979 album *Woody III*) is dedicated to Baraka.

Another important book from that teenage time of discovery was A.B. Spellman's *Black Music: Four Lives* (also called *Four Lives In The Bebop Business*). Where Baraka was high-flying, heaping riveting images into ski runs of dizzying verbiage, Spellman was stripped down and reportorial with the subjects of his four lives (Herbie Nichols, Jackie McLean, Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor) letting their individual voices fully resonate as they explain their lives and music. All the same, Spellman's own thoughts on those giants' art and the challenges of making it in a society leveraged against their creativity and humanity made just as strong of an impression on me.

Besides the writers and their books, I have so many other people to thank for their work and inspiration, from Kabir Sehgal for suggesting the theme of the Omni-Americans to all the great musicians that participated in this project. Chris Palowitch in tracking and Dave Darlington in mixing were amazing. Jamie Breiwick - what a killer job you did on the design and how effortless working with you was! And Robin D. Williams - your drawings ennobled all of us with your artistry and verve.

I especially want to thank my parents for instilling in me the love of reading that has so immeasurably enriched my existence. My mother was a reading specialist in her teaching career, and my father at 90 is still exposing me to dozens of new and absorbing books every year, not the least through the book reports he sends out to family and friends. I am blessed that they are both still here to read these words. And to Marissa, my wife, thanks from the bottom of my heart for putting up with everything that went into my making my most elaborate project ever in such an absurdly short amount of time.



PERSONNEL

BRIAN LYNCH leader / trumpet / compositions & arrangements

TOM KELLEY alto sax (lead) / soprano sax / flute

DAVID LEON alto sax / flute / clarinet

GARY KELLER tenor sax / soprano sax / flute / clarinet

CHRIS THOMPSON-TAYLOR tenor sax / clarinet

MIKE BRIGNOLA baritone sax / bass clarinet

DANTE LUCIANI lead trombone

CARTER KEY trombone

STEVEN ROBINSON trombone

JOHN KRICKER bass trombone

MICHAEL DUDLEY lead trumpet

JEAN CAZE trumpet

JASON CHAROS trumpet

ALEC ALDRED trumpet

ALEX BROWN piano

LOWELL RINGEL bass

BORIS KOZLOV electric bass

KYLE SWAN drums (2, 4, 6, 9, 10, 11)

HILARIO BELL drums (3, 5, 7, 8)

MURPH AUCAMP percussion

LITTLE JOHNNY RIVERO percussion (5, 8)

BRIAN LYNCH BIG BAND

GUEST ARTISTS

DAFNIS PRIETO drums (1)

ORLANDO "MARACA" VALLE flute (1)

DONALD HARRISON alto sax (2, 10)

REGINA CARTER violin (3)

DAVID LIEBMAN soprano sax (4)

JIM SNIDERO alto sax (6)





BRIAN LYNCH



ORLANDO "MARACA" VALLE



JIM SNIDERO



DONALD HARRISON



REGINA CARTER



DAVE LIEBMAN



DAFNIS PRIETO

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