

Connecticut improvisers have vision for raising 'musical consciousness'

by Glenn Wallach

"If someone hears my music, it becomes part of his life. It doesn't matter if they like it or not, it will have an effect on them and stay with them."

—Leo Smith

Leo Smith is one of eight Connecticut musicians who have formed the Creative Musicians Improvisers Forum (CMIF) to "carry out a greater heightening of education in music."

Organized a year ago, CMIF brings together a varied group of improvisers into a non-profit cooperative to promote creative music.

Group members play a broad range of instruments as each artist moves in different directions. "The fascinating thing about us is here you have this group of people who have similar beliefs about music, yet you have all these different results," said Yale Jazz band director and

CMIF member Dave Mott.

The group includes two Yale faculty members, and other musicians who decided that the New York scene was not for them; they are all committed to "hip the public to the fact that there's an alternative to the music they listen to now," said member Gerry Hemingway.

Smith and his musical colleagues are creative musicians. Critics have attempted to label their work "new music" or called it avant-garde.

"The term 'new music' is perhaps a misnomer," says Dwight Andrews, another CMIF member and lecturer in Afro-American Studies at Yale. "People have been doing this 'new music' for a long time."

"Too often when people think of creative music, they think of people making pops and squeaks or just banging on an instrument," said Mott.

Smith gives a stricter definition to creative music, calling it "a body of music involved in African-American music since 1865 to today." "New music" implies something that is created that has no roots," Smith says. "Creative music is never old nor is it new."

"It's very hard playing this sort of work. It's not the kind of music you play in a club," Mott said. "It's the kind of music that demands your full attention so you can listen to the musicians' vision."

"In my music, I'm trying to do many things. We're trying to restate rhythms and music right from the forest and improvising is always the important part of this," Andrews said.

Smith wants to create an institution in New Haven for music education that would teach "applied music and research in music." This would include harmony, theory in improvisation, and case studies of the pioneers of creative music like King Oliver and Louis Armstrong. He also favors investigating the building of personalized instruments for musicians.

The move towards personalization "is illustrative of a new kind of sensibility," Andrew said. He noted that three members of the group, Smith,

Hemingway, and Bobbi Naughton, have their own labels on which they distribute their music. This allows the artist to have complete control over his work, Andrews explained. "This way, the artist can control the art instead of being forced by record companies to do certain things," he said.

"Ultimately there will be a CMIF recording label on which we will release our music," Smith said.

The group doesn't plan to compete with the music industry conglomerates in New York. "I would be perfectly happy never to deal with New York but know that our records would be found in Disco-Mat or Cutler's," Andrews said.

"The best approach is not to compete. We've got a message and a vision. These things will make CMIF a solid institution," Smith hopes.

"This is a floating organization; our school may be in New Haven, but we will go to the people of Connecticut instead of having the people come to us," Smith emphasized.

The ultimate direction for CMIF is to create a place that will attract creative musicians from all parts of the country. "Anyone who sees themselves involved in something like this will be drawn here," Smith says.



YDN—Dave Friedman

LEO SMITH
CMIF Coordinator

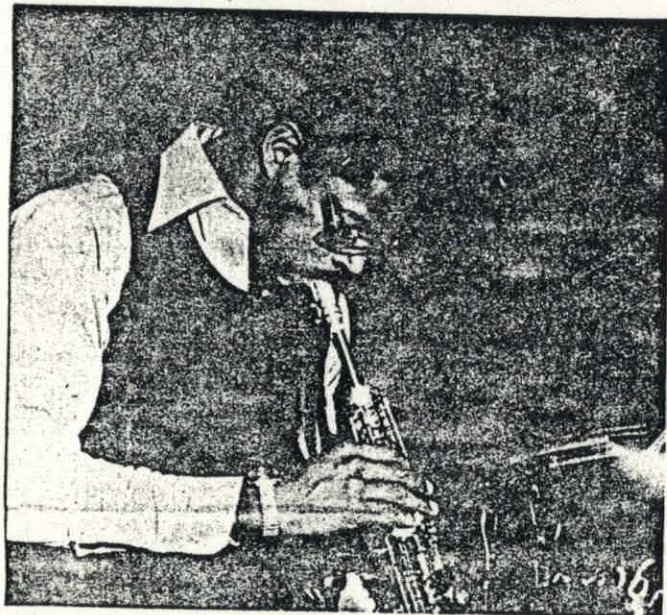
Smith has played with many artists in the creative music field including Anthony Braxton, winner of the Downbeat readers' poll for clarinet.

"My interests are in the direction of creating a world music," he said. Smith is solving problems and analyzing notation systems as he creates a new system of musical notation that encompasses musical styles from throughout the world. "No single person has influenced me, I listen to everything," he said.

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Dwight Andrews sees the Creative Musicians Improvisers Forum as part of a new sensibility for "artists to take control of their music."