

The African OmniDevelopment Space Complex



Ra'maat Ubadah Hotep Ankh McConner Iheru

ARTEIDOLIA
PRESSPRESSPRESSPRESSPRESS

New York



my A-Game
backed by SQUABBING, SCRUMMING,
GRINDING AND GRINDHOUSE RE
INVENTION OF MY W-NEW
SELF, TO RESCULPTURE
MY OWN DESTINY



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INTRODUCTION

Art is the barometer and the forecast of the condition of a society.

I met Ubadah in 1969-1970.

The early '70s post riot period, the politically charged Vietnam War era, Mohammed Ali refusing the draft and prison time, Nixon and the politics that went with it were some but not all of the factors that went into an artistic renaissance and birth of a new hunger for knowledge and growth in self awareness and Blackman's culture and heritage. While American cities were on fire with hate, some of us saw our chance to go to college and advance our cause for equality through education [Affirmative action]. Our meetings every Friday for over 30 years at Ubadah's house involved all of the above and more.

Had those Friday sessions not taken place, I am certain that I would have continued with the help of other higher caliber artists who nurtured me to personally develop myself as the professional musician

challenge because in this music, we all learned at different rates and all shared the growth and interaction and over the years a matriculation took place. It was a think tank of sorts where each person contributed and each contributor reaped knowledge in return.

Some fell by the wayside as some always do, and some players took their knowledge into other fields. A Detroit visiting sax player named Shaney later became a doctor. I went into engineering and worked for G.M. Proving Grounds for 35 years. Others went into law practice and so on.

This was an Artistic and cultural haven and sanctuary for those who searched for self understanding through challenging times. Ubadah extended his hospitality to all who came with true hearts.

NOTE!!! in all the 38 years of these Friday night, all night sessions, there were NEVER any fights, unruliness, no upset neighbors, no police visits.

That's a sign of great respect from everyone to Ubadah.

- Michael Carey

WRITING BLACK OUT LOUD

1939-1959

Saturday, November 11, 1939, sixteen minutes after high noon, at precisely 12:16 pm, I came into this existence on the Southside of Pontiac, Michigan 30 minutes after the birth of my twin brother Rashid. In fact, I was born and raised in a house just a driveway distance away from the community's legendary after hours joint that went from all night Friday night until all night Saturday. Sunday was for church and Monday was Blue Monday.

When Rashid and I were delivered in the house at 517 Harvey, we were delivered right into the music that was still vibrating and incessantly pumping out every blues record recorded at that time. From November 11, 1939 to June 12, 1951, when my family was living next door to Georgie Manning, I was fortunate to have listened to all the great Blues, Rhythm and Blues and Black Music in that epoch of my childhood. The bed that I slept in for my first 12 years

was right in the center of all the music that boomed and blasted out of the basement windows and door.

Mrs. Georgie loved music, and she had literally hundreds of records stacked all up in piles. I remember so vividly because I began my record collection based on my memory of hers. So, when I research my history and memory, this basement music studio sonic boom sound was my first lasting impression. Rashid and I had Friday night music concerts all during these hot summer months. That music was drummed into me.

Here is a list of some of the blues musicians that I remember hearing and growing up with during my first 12 years — Little Walter, B.B. King, Ray Milton, T-Bone Walker, Big Joe Turner, Amos Milburn, Memphis Slim, Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, Albert King. Sonny Boy Williamson, Howling Wolf — and then there was the Pontiac Southside legendary Blues piano player, the fabled Earlie B.

In that basement surrounded by tables weighed down with stacks and stacks of records was an old Black piano. Late, late in the wee hours of those hot summer and cold, frigid winter nights, Earlie B. would come out of his Friday night drinking binge and become a glowing red hot piece of Black cool and set that piano on so much fire that it would heat up that basement room until it rocked nonstop like a roaring train. In the summertime, I lay there in my bed at a

concert, and I loved to let the music sweep me away in its totality. In the winter, the piano and all the rocking going on seemed to make the windows glow, throb, and the power in that basement, the music that empowered and nurtured me those first 12 years of my life was a very spiritual experience that has remained with me all the days of my life. I credit Mrs. Georgie and Earlie B. as my first two music professors, and when I explore my music roots and my love and involvement in history and memory. I am proud and glad to call them my first musical beginning.

After we departed from our first music learning scene, my mother, Virginia McConner, took over, and her love of music was so complete and dramatic that she introduced me and Rashid first hand to Miles, Bird, Yusef Lateef, Horace Silver, Art Blakey, Duke Ellington, Dinah Washington, Sarah Vaughn, Ella Fitzgerald, The Clara Ward Singers, the Platters, all the popular rhythm and blues records, James Brown, Ray Charles, Count Basie, The Midnighters, The Moonglows; and in 1951, when we first moved into our new family home at 1421 Franklin Road, in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan I was allowed to cultivate my burgeoning love for music under the tutelage of my mother.

Rashid and I owe our love for jazz music to my mother's love for jazz music. She introduced us to Thelonious Monk with his Riverside record, Brilliant Corners, and she also gave us the music of Charles

Mingus with his record Pithecanthropus Erectus. Then, she introduced me to Paul Lawrence Dunbar Chambers when she received Round About Midnight in her 1958 selection from her Columbia Record Club membership. I remember that day in the 1958 summer like it was yesterday morning. I opened up the package with the record and put it on the record player and walked away, and before I had gone 3 or 4 feet, the power of Paul Chambers grabbed me with an understanding that I wanted to play the bass. It was that instant moment that life reinvented itself in me.

AFTERWORD

1972 at the Ibo Cultural Center on 6 Mile Rd. near Woodward Avenue in Detroit, where all were awaiting a burn the house down performance by a McCoy Tyner Quartet that included Sonny Fortune, Alphonse Mouzon and Calvin Hill:

“Hey European Brother.”

I had to do a double take. “Just what is he talking about? European? I’m not European. I don’t get that. Okay, I’m American, okay ... but ... European?” I was thinking to myself. This wonderful, open hearted, generous person, had just sat down next to me and introduced himself as Ubadah Bey McConner (1937-2021), who eventually came to identify as Ra’maat Ubadah Hotep Ankh McConner Iheru.

Learning that I was an aspiring player, he immediately invited me to come up to a session at his place in Pontiac, an industrial city about 30 miles north of Detroit’s central hub, and initiated a long

lasting friendship that grew far closer to family depth than friendly acquaintance.

Being as inexperienced and naive as I was at the time, all of this seemed completely ordinary and natural to me, and it's the gift of a hindsight that's been able to perceive the cumulative ripple effect of these experiences that's allowed me to recognize just how extraordinary Ubadah's character, initiatives and achievements really are. In his own words, he has been living from the git-go a "charmed life" — a charmed condition of being that he's imparted to others whenever possible.

I'd been wondering if any press or scholars had ever documented and recognized the impact of The African Omniddevelopment Space Complex / We New, a home based cultural center that hosted an artist initiated musical situation in Pontiac for 3 decades from the early 70s into 2002, and I've come across no more than a short line or two in a small Pontiac paper. I've wondered why this has been so and have been considering the filters that so often define "history."

Conventional histories are, of course, told by those who've survived and even more so by those who happen to dominate. The reverse engineering of these "histories" tends to justify a status quo and to selectively construct a narrative that makes a particular version of the present seem inevitable.

In the case of most music histories, star status often decides the price of inclusion. And, just on the say so of succeeding generations of musicians who've adopted their influences, it's hard not to notice the impact of Armstrong, Ellington, Parker, Coleman and Coltrane. But, as the threads of affiliation have grown ever and more complex during the past 5 decades, attention has defaulted more to those who are most recorded, most written about and who manage to get paid to play overseas (and every so often, even right here in Gumboamerica).

Of course, musicians should be paid appropriately and enjoy some recognition, but this default position also instantly assumes that only market oriented career paths may yield "important" music and that the "serious" value of musical process derives only from its sonic product, whereas the reality of music is much more complex than this.

One of the many, many achievements of the A.A.C.M., for example, is that so many of its members both left Chicago and successfully engaged the international music market (and their musics merit that at the least). Although these successes have helped argue some credibility for their music, it still took an association member (and not an outside gatekeeper), George E. Lewis, to write and publish that group's history in "A Power Stronger than Itself."

But, what about other initiatives that stay local, don't even leave home and don't even address market relationships? Do these therefore "not exist" as "real" music? Are they only "amateur," "folk," "hobby," "amusement" or ... "therapy?" Imported classifications such as these sidestep and gloss over the actual complexity, range, variety and meaning of musical activity.

Ubadah, for his part, never waited for any outside permission to do what he wanted to do. He did it, documented it, mythologized and sustained it on his own terms, defining his own social and artistic aesthetics and standards while successfully working them through. He magnetized and thus drew the world in, rather than vice versa, continually keeping the process receptive to new musicians and new generations without preemptively locking into any single phase.

The intensity of his musical dedication and conviction nevertheless also radiated outwards, as musicians from all around the Detroit area were aware of what he was doing, with Faruq Z. Bey, Donald Washington and James Carter being among those who'd come through regularly.

The music has also concretely changed and redirected lives, where some grew into mature musicians. Others discovered alternatives to the

undertow of the streets, while the music helped still others live and dream beyond the restrictions of their prison confinement.

I participated in activities at The African Omnidevelopment Space Complex / We New from 1972 till '75, when I drove with Sadiq, one of the drummers from that scene, to attempt for myself the artist and musician's life in NYC, and I've ever since felt myself an ambassador of the Space Complex. That world travels with me wherever I go.

Ubadah wholeheartedly accepted and encouraged anyone who came through his door, and this acceptance resonated with such a generosity that people would come to believe it — and even accept themselves more affirmatively in new ways. Such are the spaces he's created. The unconditional conviction with which he played also modeled how to do that oneself — and this is rarer than one might think.

Having since road tested my experiences with The Complex, I can attest to this contagion. When tactical and technical odds against my own artistic aspirations taste especially heavy, I notice that some of the unjustifiable confidence despite apparent evidence that sustains me is not just something I've cooked up on my own but draws also on the transcendent belief generated at 92 N. Ardmore.

This may not noticeably change the mad, probabilistic world we inhabit, but it can seriously alter what we choose to do with it. I don't think I'm at all the only participant, visitor or neighbor who's felt that way either. Just think about that Greek guy Archimedes' approach: "Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum on which to place it, and I shall move the Earth."

- patrick brennan