

An Investigation of the Life, Influences, and Music of Randy Weston

by

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Introduction

In an article written in 1973 for the journal, *Black Perspectives in Music*, J.H. Kwanbena Nketia highlights the important and continual relationship between African and African American music. Nketia states “The relationship between African and Afro-American music is dynamic and unbroken at the conceptual level in spite of the differences in materials to which these concepts are applied.”¹ This statement articulates the importance of African music in the creation of African American music, at its inception, and continued development of African American music in modern times. This relationship has not always been recognized in past music scholarship. Nketia says, “The importance of the music of Africa in historical studies of Afro-American music has tended to be seen more as providing a point of departure than as something that continues to be relevant to the present.”² There are studies that give African music credit for the continual influence it has had on African American music; however, Nketia’s words are as relevant today as they were in 1973. It is my intention to present a study that is sensitive to the claims made by Nketia. The work presented here identifies the continued application of traditional African musical and cultural traits in jazz composition and performance.

Many jazz musicians utilized traditional African traits in their music. Randy Weston was not the first musician to do so, however jazz fans and scholars will remember him because his experiences, influences, and music clearly demonstrate the importance traditional African culture played in his life. Weston was born in Brooklyn during the Harlem Renaissance. Political views that predominated African American culture at that time greatly influenced his parents. Weston’s father felt a particularly strong connection to his African heritage and instilled Marcus Garvey’s version of pan-Africanism into Randy Weston’s consciousness.³

While his father was a great influence on his early childhood, Duke Ellington, one of the most important musicians of the Harlem Renaissance, also influenced Weston. Ellington reinforced the importance Weston's father placed on knowing their African roots. At the same time, Ellington, a dominant musical figure of the Harlem Renaissance, became an important musical influence on Weston.

As Weston grew up, he looked up to the musicians of the bebop jazz era. In Weston's view, their music contained a greater sense African heritage than music made by musicians of the Harlem Renaissance. Thelonious Monk, one of the most significant contributors to bebop, befriended Weston and became a mentor to the young man. In Monk, Weston recognized "the spirit of an African master."⁴ While Weston learned to interpret music similar to Monk's musical style, he also developed a keener sense of African aesthetics through his personal relationship with Monk.

As a young adult, Weston took every opportunity to hear and learn about traditional African music. He went to performances, listened to recordings, and interacted with African delegates at the United Nations. Weston's interest and research in traditional African music coincided with the growing cultural interest in Africa among the general African American population during the 1950s. The turbulence of intense civil rights activism during this period encouraged Weston to merge African music with jazz in his composition, *Uhuru Afrika*. All of the above influences helped Randy Weston to be conscious of his heritage, and through his musical output, he was able to connect with that heritage in a way that was significant to him.

In the early 1950s, Weston had already established himself as a prominent jazz pianist before ever recording any African inspired work. Therefore, one might ask, why did he feel the need to focus so intensely on African music? Weston answers this question by stating, "We are still an African people and to understand ourselves better and understand the world better, Africa being the first civilization, I've got to study and learn about what happened a thousand years ago."⁵ In a personal interview, Weston stated, "The history of African people did not begin with slavery but goes back thousands of years."⁶ The importance of understanding African history and heritage as it relates to American history and heritage is the first step to improving the lives of all Americans through acceptance, equality, and diversity.

I have divided this project into two sections. In "Musical and Social Influences Early Life", I will focus on the influences that aided in Weston's development. A comprehensive understanding of the influences that were instrumental in shaping Weston's philosophical view of life and his musical output is vital to understanding not only what kind of music Weston created, but equally important, why he chose to produce jazz infused with African music. In "The Music of Randy Weston", I examine the use of African music in Weston's compositions during the early part of his professional career. In this section, I analyze Weston's music using techniques designed to flush out the intentional use of African musical traits in both large ensemble composition and piano performance.

Musical and Social Influences Early Life

Jazz pianist/composer Randy Weston was born in Brooklyn, New York, on April 06, 1926. He is best known in the jazz community for his use of traditional African material in both written compositions and improvisation. Weston was not born or raised in Africa, but in Brooklyn; therefore, he had to study and research traditional African music in order to become familiar with it enough to compose using African elements.

From an early age, Weston sought out a diverse musical education. “I used to get early Folkways recordings- prison songs, field hollers, the old blues- so I was already searching.”⁷ His parents’ love of music and African American heritage encouraged Weston’s search. “I grew up listening to Negro spirituals on my mother’s side, I listened to a lot of West Indian calypso on Pop’s side. So when I went over there, [to Africa] I heard both in their raw form. I heard the basic rhythms that I recognized from the calypso music, and I heard some of the singing and hand clapping that I heard in the church on my mom’s side.”⁸

Weston’s father influenced him greatly by introducing him to the music and concepts popular during the Harlem Renaissance. “My father took me to see Duke [Ellington] and Andy Kirk at the Sonia Ballroom and Brooklyn Palace. We’d hear [calypso bands] Duke of Iron and Macbeth in Harlem... we listened to [my mothers] spirituals. I grew up in a rich culture, a rich period.”⁹ The rich period Weston talks about, the Harlem Renaissance period, most certainly had a profound influence on Weston’s childhood development.

In addition to listening to diverse styles of music, Weston also searched out books to read. “As a boy I was always going to libraries, and my father would have at home books to learn more about my history, my heritage, because I certainly wasn’t getting it in the schools.”¹⁰ Weston’s father always tried to instill the importance of Weston’s African heritage; he would say, “Africa is the past, the present, and the future.”¹¹ Weston’s father was a Panamanian born Jamaican and was very interested in the cultural writings of Marcus Garvey.¹²

Duke Ellington’s Influence on Weston

Duke Ellington was a particularly important influence on Weston, both musically and philosophically. Musically, Weston assimilated Ellington’s creative use of timbre, in his piano voicings and his band orchestration. Weston also credits Ellington for directly influencing his use of African music. “Duke Ellington...did a lot of composition about Africa. [He] knew the connection; so it’s not something brand new, it was just something that got cut off. Without the influence of those before me, there wouldn’t have been any Randy Weston.”¹³ Ellington’s recording “The Drum is a Woman,” among others, was certainly influential to Weston’s own compositional techniques as will be examined later.

Ellington and his music had a great influence on Weston but the two musicians also share many philosophical beliefs. Marcus Garvey influenced both of them profoundly. In fact, Ellington went so far as to suggest that Garvey's work influenced many musicians. In his autobiography Ellington states, "Bop...is the Marcus Garvey extension."¹⁴ Weston, like Ellington, connected with Garvey's concept of Pan-Africanism and the assertion that much of African America's African heritage came via the Caribbean. I will expand on the importance of this fact in regards to Weston in detail later on. However, it is clear that both Ellington and Weston shared a clear understanding of Pan-Africanism that was associated with the Harlem Renaissance movement and the writings of Marcus Garvey.

Finally, in the liner notes to his recorded tribute to Duke Ellington, Weston explains the debt and gratitude he owes to Ellington. He states:

I was trying to play funny things in between notes, trying to get sounds on the piano, but I hadn't heard anybody do that yet until I heard Monk. Ellington had been doing it all the while—before Monk, before me, before any of us. Duke in the 20s was already doing this but he had his full orchestra and he was so creative that it was hard to catch up to Ellington. Duke wrote many songs about Africa and about African people. But, he also wrote about calypso, about the Caribbean. The worth of the Duke, his music, and his most valuable appendage, his orchestra, to black or African musicians like myself, cannot be underestimated.¹⁵

As Weston matured, he began studying the piano seriously during the 1940s, at the height of the bebop jazz era. He grew up in Brooklyn and lived next to Max Roach. Roach, a drummer and significant contributor to bebop, encouraged Weston to continue playing. While Weston hung out with Roach and other bebop musicians, Thelonious Monk had the greatest impact on Weston during this exciting time in jazz history.

Thelonious Monk

As a teenager, Weston built upon his childhood influences. He had childhood friends who took him to hear African music performed in Brooklyn. This exposure led him to the music of Thelonious Monk. Monk became a mentor to Weston. Although Monk did not consciously use African material in his music, Weston felt that Monk had an unconscious spiritual connection to Africa.

While Ellington was socially conscious, composing music to reflect his feelings about African and African American issues, in general, it appears that Monk was not concerned with things of that nature. "I'm not in power," states Monk. "I'm not worrying about politics...Let the statesmen do that—that's their job."¹⁶ By his comments made in interviews, Monk also appears to be unconcerned with racial issues. "I hardly know anything about it," he says, speaking of racial problems. "I never was interested in those Muslims. If you want to know, you should ask Art Blakey. I don't have to change my name—it's always been weird enough! I haven't done one of those 'freedom' suites, and I don't intend to. I mean, I don't see the point. I'm not thinking that race thing now, it's not on my mind."¹⁷ From Monk's statements, it seems that he was completely absorbed in his music and had no regard for the cultural Aspects of the time. However, according to people who knew Monk personally, the pianist did not always voice what he was thinking. Saxophonist and scholar Nathan Davis has suggested that at times Monk may even tell you the opposite of what he was thinking, "just to mess with you."¹⁸ It may be the case in the statements above, that Monk was not expressing his true feelings on the topics of politics and race.

Though he may not have voiced his concerns with politics, racial issues or civil rights, Monk's music displayed an unconscious link to African aesthetics. His choice of chord voicings produced unique timbres, and he performed in a natural polyrhythm relationship with the other accompanying instruments. His overall piano playing is percussive and is akin to the way African musicians utilize their instruments. These musical attributes sparked Weston's interest in Monk as a pianist.

Weston first heard Monk play in Coleman Hawkins's band.¹⁹ Weston introduced himself to Monk after a gig and arranged to visit him at his apartment. During one visit to Monk's apartment, Weston states, "He played piano for almost three hours for me. Then I spent the next three years with Monk." Though Monk hardly spoke during their get-togethers, Weston still learned a great deal from the man. Weston continues, "Later I found out that Sufi mystics didn't speak through words. Ancient, wise people knew how to speak without words."²⁰ Monk was a big influence on the development of Weston as a person and a musician. This is because Weston was an impressionable teenager when he met Monk and the revered jazz musician made himself available to Weston. Weston looked up to Monk. In an art form where artists place a premium on originality, Weston considered Monk the most original pianist he had ever heard.

Like many listeners, when Weston first heard Monk play with Hawkin's group, Monk's unique style struck Weston as abrasive and unpolished. However, Weston's opinion changed after hearing him again. "The next time I heard him, I knew that was the direction I wanted to go in. That happened because Ahmed Abdul-Malik played with Monk, and he would take me to Atlantic Avenue."²¹ Weston states that "Monk was from another dimension...but most pianists in the 1940s didn't like Monk. They said he couldn't play. But I knew he was the most original pianist I ever heard."²²

Malik was a childhood friend who would take Weston to hear African musicians performing in Brooklyn. This was one of Weston's earliest exposures to traditional African music. Weston states, "I grew up in Brooklyn with the great bassist Ahmed Abdul-Malik, whose father was Sudanese. He also played the oud, and when we were kids he'd take me to Atlantic Avenue in downtown Brooklyn to hear musicians play the instruments of North Africa and the Middle East."²³

Weston heard these musicians play quartertones and notes in-between the Western half steps. He absorbed the music he heard at the time and attempted to apply it to the piano. "I would try to play like that on the piano, but Monk was already doing it."²⁴ He continues, "[Monk] was the most original I ever heard; he played like they must have played in Egypt 5,000 years ago. For me it was pure African piano."²⁵ Not only does this statement show Weston's interpretation of Monk's music, it also shows an underlying Pan-African theme of Weston's thoughts that African music comes from the whole continent and not just West Africa. In part two it will become clear that Weston's concept of Pan-Africanism, like that of Ellington's during the Harlem Renaissance, had a significant influence on Weston's work as a composer and musician.

What attracted Weston to Monk and his music? It was Monk's rhythmic and timbre approach that drew Weston in. In Monk's playing, Weston heard a natural unconscious African element. Weston was aware of the similarities between the piano styles of Ellington and Monk and their similarities further strengthened his appreciation of the two of them. Though Monk did not openly display an interest in Africa or traditional African music, it is clear that the spirit of Africa was strong in Monk and Weston could sense this. In an interview with Leslie Gourse, Weston states:

I loved Monk personally because he was a master, but not in the Western sense. In the West, to be a master, all you have to do is play well, that's it. From my years with traditional Africans I learned that in the East, you have to be respected in your community. And in Monk's neighborhood, when we walked together, people acknowledged him. To be a master, you have to be clean of mind and spirit. And he was clean of mind and spirit. He did not speak it, didn't waste words; he lived it. In our tradition, our people didn't talk a lot. Monk was from that tradition... When he said something, it was powerful. It was different.²⁶

According to Gourse, “when Randy went to Egypt and studied African history and music, he came to realize that Monk, was “like the reincarnation of the ancient spirit of Africa. Randy didn’t hear any of Europe in Monk’s music. He heard the way an African hears. He heard spiritualism and mysticism.”²⁷ Monk’s influence on Weston became greater as Weston began to study traditional African music and culture leading into the 1960s. “After years in Africa I came to believe that God sent prophets to bring us beauty in life,” says Weston. “Monk was that for me. He shared music with me...we shared and became inseparable.”²⁸

Scholars have traced the use of African material back to Jelly Roll Morton’s use of the “Latin Tinge” in his solo piano works.²⁹ Aside from the influence that Ellington and Monk had on Weston, another of Weston’s important influences of African-influenced jazz was the Cuban infused music of Chano Pozo in Dizzy Gillespie’s big band. Weston describes his first opportunity to hear Pozo with Gillespie, “Hearing Chano Pozo with Dizzy Gillespie’s Orchestra in 1947 turned me around, and I’ve been working with hand drums ever since. Chano was Cuban, but you could hear pure Africa in his drum sound. It was a marriage, a complete circle.”³⁰ Weston’s assertion that African music was present throughout the diaspora reflects his understanding of Pan-Africanism; “When you look at world history and you see the African retention in what we do here, in what we do in Jamaica and Brazil, you hear it in the music. You hear the rhythm, you hear the call and response, and you hear the humor.”³¹

Weston stressed that despite being in “different parts of the world and speaking different languages,”³² it was important for decedents of Africa to identify with the African continent. “Africa is like a huge tree, with branches to Brazil, to Cuba, and America. The approach to music is identical: rhythm, polyrhythm, call and response.”³³ Weston’s opinion of the importance of African music does not end with Latin America, the Caribbean, and African America. He states, “Most of the music of the Western Hemisphere comes out of African traditional music.”³⁴ Certainly many recent popular music scholars have tended to agree with Weston’s opinion.³⁵ However, the question may be asked, why does Weston place such importance on the influence of traditional African music? He says it is because, “There’s always the emphasis on the differences in us. But I’m looking for the similar.”³⁶

Civil Rights

During the fifties and sixties Weston joined the professional world as a young adult. It was at the height of the Civil Rights Movement and pride in traditional African culture was very high. All of Weston’s previous influences fit well with the political climate. The appreciation Weston developed for traditional African culture blossomed during this time and he capitalized on the renewed public interest in African culture to learn as much as he could about African music.

In the 1950's, Weston spent eight summers in Lenox, Massachusetts, where he met Marshall Sterns and participated in his Jazz history classes, demonstrating modern jazz on the piano. Sterns reinforced Weston's concept of jazz as having originated in Africa and not just in New Orleans.³⁷ Weston also met other inspirational colleagues during his summers in Lenox. "I spent time in the Berkshires with African choreographer Osadali Duforum. He inspired me to collect African traditional music; it was a natural process of listening, but not necessarily listening with your ears, almost like listening with your spirit."³⁸ Between summers, back in New York, Weston began to pursue interests in Africa by interacting with people from the United Nations. He would frequently ask them for traditional music from their respective countries. He met with visiting officials from different countries. "I'd always ask about the music. They might give me a tape or a book, and I slowly started to learn."³⁹ Weston's musical development and research culminated in an extended, four-movement composition that fused together traditional African musical material with jazz. Weston called the composition *Uhuru Afrika*.

Uhuru Afrika

Like many jazz musicians during the Civil Rights movement, Weston composed and recorded an extended composition advocating civil rights and celebrating strides civil rights advocates had made at the time.⁴⁰ Unlike many of the other political jazz suites, Weston's composition was not restricted to commentary on the political struggles in America. Weston chose to dedicate his composition to the struggles and strides made by Africans throughout the diaspora. This does not come as a surprise, given the degree Garvey influenced Weston's concept of Pan-Africanism. In fact, the focus of Weston's *Uhuru Afrika* was the emerging independence of the new African nations, freed from the claws of colonialism.

By 1960, seventeen African nations had gained independence. This was a source of joy and inspiration for Weston. He considered the nations that had emerged to be inspirational models for nations that were still struggling under oppression. He also saw the independence of Africa as inspiration for those struggling for equality in the United States.

Although Weston had not yet been to Africa, his idea of a connected African people, despite their location throughout the diaspora, most certainly influenced his extended work. *Uhuru Afrika* was one of Weston's first conscious efforts to use African music in a composition; it displays a mixture of traditional African material and elements of the diaspora. Record producer Michael Cuscuna has reissued *Uhuru Afrika* twice. He shows his appreciation of Weston's *Uhuru Afrika* by stating, "So much music in the '60s used Africa superficially as window dressing, but this was the real deal—an honest, well-written, well researched fusion of jazz and African music."⁴¹

On November 16, 1960, Weston began recording *Uhuru Afrika* and his choice of musicians for this recording was very specific. Weston states, “I wanted to use a big band, and I wanted to use artists from Africa and artists of African descent. Jazz musicians, cats from the Broadway shows, a classical singer, a guy from East Africa, a guy from West Africa.”⁴² He continues, “We wanted a rhythm section that showed how all drums come from the African drum.”⁴³ The rhythm section included Nigerian percussionist Babatunde Olatunji, Caribbean drummer Candido, and Cuban percussionist Armando Peraza. It is clear from Weston’s statements and his choice of musicians that he attempted to incorporate many different types of African music into his composition.

Weston was able to bring together African, Caribbean, and African American musicians from very different cultures and used their common African roots to create a synthesis of Pan-African music that resulted in the music of *Uhuru Afrika*. The use of African musicians from throughout the diaspora makes *Uhuru Afrika* an important composition during the Black Arts movement of the 1960s. *Uhuru Afrika* had an even stronger impact in Africa than it did in the United States. In 1964, the South African government banned Weston’s recording of *Uhuru Afrika* because of its encouragement of colonial freedom.⁴⁴

Weston’s entry into the professional world of music in the late 1950s and his composition *Uhuru Afrika* marked the beginning of Weston’s use of African musical material in both composition and performance. It is at this point that I will depart from the influences that helped to shape Weston’s ideas and work, and I will turn to his musical output.

The Music of Randy Weston

Before I begin with an examination of the use of traditional African musical techniques in the music of Randy Weston, a brief explanation of the methodology behind this analysis is necessary. The concept of borrowing from one music culture to enhance another is not a new concept. Composer and ethnomusicologist, Akin Euba established a systematic approach to the study of intercultural relationships in a field he calls Intercultural Musicology.⁴⁵ Euba developed many of the concepts espoused in Intercultural Musicology because of interaction between Africans and Europeans during the time of colonization in Africa.

Intercultural Activity

Euba identifies two kinds of intercultural creative activity. One occurs when composers or improvisers integrate elements of two or more cultures into compositions. The second occurs through performance, where the “music and the performer originate from different cultures.”⁴⁶ Both forms of this intercultural activity took place during colonial times and continued after West Africa gained its independence.

Harmony is the most influential of all European musical elements in Africa. Kofi Agawu states, “Of all the musical influences spawned by the colonial encounter, that of tonal functional harmony has been the most pervasive, the most far reaching.”⁴⁷ Considering this, it is not surprising that the piano has become one of the most influential European instruments in Africa. African Pianism, a term coined by Euba, is the integration of elements of African music with the piano. Euba indicates that this integration could involve an African musician who plays classical music; but it could also describe a non-African musician who employs African musical elements in a composition that he performs on the piano.

There has been much criticism over the use of the piano, a European instrument, in the composition of music identified as African. However, the piano is simply a tool that the musician uses to express himself. In the hands of the composer, it makes little difference whether it is of European origin. It is an available means to express a musical end. Many instruments that were not indigenous to Africa have become part of its musical tradition. These include the hourglass tension drum and fiddles that originated from Middle East and the guitar that originated from Portugal and Spain. In addition, A.M. Jones has suggested that the popular one string fiddle, the Goje, probably came from the Middle East, and the xylophone may have come from Indonesia. “The goje and xylophone are today regarded as African, evidence that the assimilation and adoption of “foreign” musical instruments have long been a facet of African culture.”⁴⁸ The Portuguese were responsible for introducing the Spanish guitar to Africa in the sixteenth century. It arrived with sailors on merchant ships that traded along the African coast.⁴⁹

The piano is but another instrument, a tool that the African musician may use as part of a rich percussive melodic tradition. In fact, because the piano is a percussion instrument and yet has the ability to produce many different pitches, it seems like the ideal instrument for African music. As Euba points out, “At a point of cultural contact, musical instruments presumably maintain a close relationship to their prototypes, but begin to diverge and assume new structural features, functions, idioms, and so forth when adapted to local conditions...this occurs only after several millennia.”⁵⁰ The use of the piano, however, is still too “close to the point of cultural contact” for any substantial developmental features to be identifiable.⁵¹

The concept of African Pianism, introduced above, has primarily been identified in the genre of Western classical music.⁵² Euba identifies it in solo piano music, in chamber groups, and in compositions for large orchestras. The majority of compositions, and for that reason literature, on African Pianism has been in the Western classical music vein. However, African pianism can exist in other forms of music; particularly forms that have the ability to incorporate elements of African music with distinctly different styles. For instance, there is the potential for an African Pianism that synthesizes African and Chinese music, or African and Indian music.

African Pianism is not just the product of African fusion with Western classical music; it has also developed through interaction between Africa and America. At the same time that colonial and post-colonial Africans interacted with Western European musicians, African American musicians, particularly jazz musicians, became increasingly aware of their African roots. This cultural awareness was continuous from the beginning of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, however it increased in intensity during the Harlem Renaissance and again during the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 60s. Particularly during the Civil Rights movement, jazz musicians began using African musical elements in their compositions and improvised solos. Improvisation is one musical element present in both African music and jazz, that brings the two traditions closer and allows for an easier transition for musicians to integrate the two music traditions into an African Pianism, through jazz performance.

The primary musicians involved in intercultural relations between Africa and America have been African musicians and African American musicians. Euba states that, "From a certain perspective all known types of contemporary music existing in the world may be said to be intercultural."⁵³ However, what is most interesting about the intercultural relationship between Africans and African Americans is that African Americans have specifically sought to connect with their African roots. The fact that Africans and African Americans are closely culturally related allows for the possibility of a tightly interwoven relationship, however the closer the relationship is between two interacting cultures, the more complicated it becomes to distinguish between individual traits of the two cultures.

While I consider all jazz pianism a type of African Pianism, I believe that it is important to differentiate jazz that intentionally attempts to incorporate African musical elements and jazz that does not. There is no argument that jazz contains unmistakable African musical elements and was developed by descendants of Africans. However, it has been acculturated into American culture to the extent that it must be seen as distinctly separate from African music. In this way, musicians who consciously incorporate African elements into their music to enhance it, make the incorporation of African material distinctly identifiable. It should also be understood that under Euba's definition, African Pianism might also include African pianists who play jazz; presumably because they would consciously or unconsciously incorporate identifiable African musical elements, into traditional jazz repertoire.

It is with Euba's theoretical concept of the integration between traditional African musical elements and Western musical elements that I shall progress to the investigation of the music of Randy Weston.

The Music of Randy Weston

Weston uses musical elements to re-establish his roots in Africa. He integrates African musical elements into his own playing, which is primarily in a jazz style. He also utilizes African musicians and instruments in combination with Western instruments to create a synthesis of African music and jazz; he has abandoned the term jazz, opting to describe his music as African Rhythms.

To understand Weston's African Rhythms, we must first understand Weston's concept of Africanism in full detail. Indeed, his idea of Africa is not restricted to sub-Saharan Africa. It includes Africans and their music throughout the diaspora. Thus, Weston's use of African musical techniques is not restricted to traditional African material. He infuses his music with traditional West African folk songs and dance rhythms, but he uses material from Latin America, the Caribbean, North Africa and Sub-Saharan African popular music all equally. In discussing African elements in Weston's music, all music of the diaspora is included in many of its traditional and synthetic forms. If it is necessary, we might then label Weston's activity as Pan-African Pianism.

Pan-African Pianism

Keeping Weston's philosophical concepts in mind, we move to his musical work in order to investigate his use of African music in composition and performance. Looking at both Weston's use of the piano and at his ensemble compositions, we can see elements of all of Euba's African Pianism techniques. Euba, puts forth five characteristics that facilitate identifying the use of African musical traits in other styles of music:

1. Direct borrowing of thematic material from traditional African sources
2. Thematic repetition
3. The use of rhythmical or tonal motifs based on traditional sources
4. Percussive treatment of the piano
5. Making the piano behave like an African instrument

An examination of Weston's artistic output will show that he has utilized all of these techniques.

1. Direct borrowings of thematic material from traditional African sources

Weston's most obvious use of thematic material borrowed directly from traditional African sources is his song, "Congolese Children." This song appears on a few of his recordings from the 1960s and 70s, however it was first released on the album *Highlife: Music from the New African Nations* recorded in 1963. "Congolese Children" is Weston's adaptation of a traditional Bashai Pygmy song that he heard schoolboys from the Bashai tribe singing during his trip to Congo. The melody is based on a diatonic scale, F major, and he sets the melody in a straightforward 4/4 meter. Weston has recorded this piece in multiple settings. On the original recording, the composition is arranged for six horns and a rhythm section. Weston has also performed the piece on solo piano. In both situations the melody is of prime importance and is repeated numerous times. With each repetition of the melody, Weston alters the instrumentation and harmonic organization of the accompaniment. One of Weston's favorite arranging techniques is to have the full ensemble state the melody the first time through and on the repeat, play the melody on the piano with no accompaniment from the horns.⁵⁴ The number of times the melody is repeated is unusual for a jazz arrangement compared to the norm of the time. This indicates that a high level of importance is placed on the melody, as it would be if it were sung over and over again by children.



Figure 1 "Congolese Children" melody

On his album, *Highlife*, Weston also arranged and performed two compositions by modern African composers, "Niger Mambo," by Bobby Benson and "Mystery of Love," by Guy Warren. Weston's use of these songs falls under Euba's first technique of African Pianism. Both Benson and Warren employ traditional African percussion and rhythm patterns in their respective pieces, merging these traditional musical traits with the use of Western horns. Weston's interpretation of their compositions demonstrates his understanding of the unwritten characteristics of the music that musicians must perform in order for us to identify African elements in the composition. Weston could have interpreted these compositions with a more traditional jazz performance; yet, he chose to emphasize the African material in each. He did this by preserving the African rhythmic patterns and instruments prescribed by the composers.

“Niger Mambo,” composed by famous highlife musician Bobby Benson, is essentially a highlife song.⁵⁵ The drumbeat that Weston’s rhythm section plays is consistent with that of other highlife songs of the time. The use of a highlife rhythm pattern rather than a jazz swing pattern indicates that Weston understood the importance of preserving the African rhythmic element in Benson’s composition. I have indicated the highlife rhythm used here in example 2.



Figure 2 The highlife rhythmic pattern used in “Niger Mambo.”

Weston was so fond of Guy Warren’s “Mystery of Love” that it became the theme song for his African Rhythms ensemble. The work features a more traditional rhythmic organization than Benson’s tune; in fact, the rhythmic pattern used in this composition is a well-known timeline common in traditional music of West Africa. I discuss this piece further below.

2. Thematic repetition

Thematic repetition is a technique used quite often by Weston, and it can be heard in conjunction with many of the other African Pianistic techniques. The use of repetition in Weston’s music can be found in left hand ostinatos in compositions such as the first movement of *Uhuru Afrika*, and piece titled “Lagos” written in 1963. In both examples, the repetition of the ostinato creates a steady, rhythmically oriented accompaniment in which the establishment of a groove takes precedence over harmonic movement.

Weston has recorded this song many different times. When Weston performs “Mystery of Love” with a rhythm section as he does on the recording, *Highlife*, the percussion section accompanies the melody with a West African timeline. This timeline pattern is very common in traditional West African music and is often referred to as the ‘standard time pattern.’⁵⁷ On Weston’s recording, this pattern is accompanied by a high drum part that plays in polyrhythm with the standard time pattern. The same kind of interaction between the high drum part and standard time pattern can be found in the traditional Ewe funeral dance rhythm, Adowa. In Adowa, a secondary bell pattern is identical to the high drum part performed in “Mystery of Love.” As can be seen from these examples, the interaction between the two parts is very similar. During solo piano performances “Mystery of Love,” Weston plays the common African timeline in the upper range of the keyboard, imitating the African bell that usually plays the rhythm.

Standard time pattern with high drum secondary part in “Mystery of Love”

Standard Time pattern

High Drum Pattern

Primary Adowa bell pattern with secondary bell pattern

Figure 4 Standard time pattern

Weston is also fond of using African tonal motifs when improvising solos. For example, on the recording of “Mystery of Love” recorded in 1963, he improvises using an organization of melodic tones that is consistent with Anlo Ewe tonal organization.⁵⁸ While the remainder of the ensemble states the melody and provides a stable accompaniment, Weston improvises a solo line that complements the melody. He limits his note choices to six tones over the span of three octaves. These pitches are C#, D#, E, F#, G#, and B. Using these tones in stepwise motion creates the sense of C# minor, or a C# dorian mode without the A#, the sixth degree. However, upon a closer look at the way Weston utilizes these tones, he uses them in a way that is closer to that of Anlo Ewe traditional melodic construction.

It is widely accepted that traditional African vocal music may employ scales from four to seven steps.⁵⁹ However, in his dissertation, *Tonal Resources and Compositional Processes of Ewe Traditional Vocal Music*, George Dor states that “Anlo Ewe use pentatonic tonal resources in constructing their melodies.”⁶⁰ One of Dor’s most significant assertions is that Ewe songs may contain up to seven tones; however, two of these tones function as added tones and are only used in specific circumstances. In addition, it is common for Ewe composers and performers to utilize two closely related pentatonic scales, which creates a sense that the tonal construction is hexatonic when it is pentatonic. Dor states:

Hexatonic modes are mostly realized in songs that introduce a sixth tone only at certain structural points of a melody that is originally pentatonic...What I call ‘temporary tones’ within Anlo hexatonic tonal resources can be explained under the following rubrics: (1) sparing use under which...neighbor tones can be subsumed; (2) juxtaposition of two pentatonic modes...⁶¹

Weston’s implementation of the six tones in his solo corresponds closely to that of Anlo Ewe vocalists.⁶² The primary nature of the solo is pentatonic. The first pentatonic scale, C# E F#, G# and B, is outlined clearly in the descending line moving from measure one to measure two. (See example 5.) The D# makes its first appearance in the second phrase. At this point the D# seems to take precedence over the E, thereby relegating the E to an upper neighbor tone in measure three and in the descending cadential figure of the second phrase. In Western music, including jazz, the minor pentatonic represented in Weston’s solo C# E F# G# and B is quite common; in fact, it could be said that the majority of pentatonic improvisation focuses on this form of the anhemitonic pentatonic scale. Why then, does Weston choose to emphasize the D# over the E? The simple answer may be that the D# features prominently in Warrens original Melody. However, there may be a closer connection to the tonal organization of Anlo Ewe music, if only subconsciously.

It is thus significant to note the emphasis Weston places on the D#, which creates the pentatonic C# D# F# G# and B. This configuration of a pentatonic scale, at first seems to be uncommon in Western music. However, it can be reordered as the third mode of a G# minor pentatonic. If looked at from this perspective, Weston is juxtaposing two minor pentatonic scales with the same construction, simply by utilizing both the D# and E in his improvisation. This same exact juxtaposition can be found in Anlo Ewe vocal music.⁶³ In his dissertation, Dor presents a juxtaposition of two pentatonic scales with the same relationship as the ones used by Weston. Dor gives an example of an Ewe song that utilized the tones D E F G A and C, each tone is a half step higher than its corresponding pitch in Weston’s solo. Dor indicates that while a reduction of the tone set would indicate a hexatonic tonal organization, the specific use of tones indicates a pentatonic function.



Figure 5 First phrases of Weston's improvised solo on "Mystery of Love"

4. Percussive treatment of the piano

Weston has a fondness for turning the piano into a percussion instrument where rhythmic articulation and timbre play a much larger role than specific note choices. Robert L. Doerschuk points out that "At times [Weston moves] to the bottom of the 96-key Bosendorfer Imperial Grand. The rumble of these lowest notes doubtless appeals to Weston's fascination with blurring the line between percussive effects and tonality."⁶⁴ An example of this can be heard on a solo performance of Weston's composition "Lagos." Here Weston uses the lowest notes of his piano to represent a repeating rhythmic drone of unspecified pitch. He also uses this technique to represent his impression of the rhythm of an airplane.⁶⁵

Another example of the percussive treatment of the piano can be heard in the introduction of Weston's solo performance of "Blues to Africa", from the Album of the same name. In this example, Weston contrasts low rumbling chords with a one-note rhythm played with drum-like percussive sound on the piano. This piece can also be heard on the recording *Highlife*. On the *Highlife* version, the low rumbling note clusters are given to the horns, and the trombone in particular plays with a tone that sounds reminiscent of the Kakaki, the long royal trumpet of the Hausa of northern Nigeria. However, Weston keeps the one note percussive line in the piano and plays in polyrhythm with the drum set.

5. Make the Piano Behave like an African Instrument.

During the introduction of many of his compositions, Weston will often improvise in the low end of his piano while the rest of the musicians provide accompaniment. When this is done, Weston's role as soloist is analogous to that of a master drum in an African drum ensemble in the sense that both are improvising authoritatively using low resonating pitches.

At the same time, his band functions in the same role as the accompanying instruments of the African drum ensemble. The accompanying instruments provide repeating ostinato rhythms, and Weston solos on top of this accompaniment in the same way master drummer would fit his part into a drum ensemble.

Weston is also fond of imitating other African instruments such as the xylophone and the Mbira. In his compositions "Congolese Children" and "Kasbah Kids," he employs a technique that imitates what at first sounds like a toy piano. However, upon further listening Weston is imitating a small xylophone or Mbira. In both situations, he plays a single line in each hand in polyrhythmic counterpoint. Furthermore, in each case one of the hands plays a repeated ostinato that provides an accompaniment to the melody, which can be found in the other hand.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for piano accompaniment. The first system, starting at measure 9, shows a right-hand melody with eighth and sixteenth notes and a left-hand ostinato of quarter notes. The second system, starting at measure 13, continues the right-hand melody with more complex rhythmic patterns and the same left-hand ostinato. The notation includes treble and bass clefs, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 7/8 time signature.

Figure 6 "Congolese Children" mbira impression

In the performance of “Congoese Children” this technique is used for only one eight-bar section of the melody. In the example of “Kasbah Kids,” the entire song is played in the upper range of the piano making it reminiscent of a small xylophone or Mbira. In this composition, Weston plays repeating melodic motifs in his right hand while in his left hand he plays an accompanying melody which creates a polyphonic song that Weston says is his interpretation of kids playing and singing in the streets of Kasbah Morocco.



Figure 7 “Kasbah Kids” impression of mbira

Weston’s use of African material is not limited to these musical examples but abounds in all of his ensemble and solo performances. He has effectively assimilated African material into his playing to the extent that his use of the term African Rhythms for his music, rather than jazz, is justified.

Analysis of “Uhuru Kwanza”

For much of his life Weston had listened to and studied traditional African music. He took every opportunity he had to listen to the music of Africa in live performances and on recordings, often given to him by United Nation’s delegates. In a sense, his research culminated in the composition and recording of *Uhuru Afrika*, recorded in 1959. Aside from the political statement Weston made with this composition, he also incorporated within it many aspects of traditional African music. In fact, *Uhuru Afrika* is quite possibly his most complete synthesis of traditional African music with jazz.

Weston sets *Uhuru Afrika* into five sections, an introduction, and four movements. Although the introduction is relatively brief, it is significant, as it is marked by a collaboration of Weston with Langston Hughes, whose freedom poem, Weston uses for the introduction. Langston Hughes’ participation in this project is significant because he was an instrumental contributor to both the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement. Tuntemeke Sanga, a friend of Weston’s and a United Nations Delegate from Tanzania, performed Hughes’s text in a combination of English and Swahili. Weston chose to use Swahili because he felt that it represented a unified Africa. This is yet another example of his philosophy of inclusion, of a united African people, a philosophy developed by the influences mentioned in part one of this work.

For this composition, Weston employed different combinations of horns and percussion along with a jazz rhythm section. In its fullest sections Weston used four trumpets, three trombones, and five saxophonists—who double at times on piccolo, flute, and clarinet—guitar, bass, drums, piano, hand percussion, bongos and congas. The full ensemble is only heard in short sections in movement II and III. For the remainder of the composition he uses the horns in smaller groups, mixing up the combinations in order to acquire specific tonal textures.

“Uhuru Kwanza” begins with drums and percussion.⁶⁶ African hand drums and percussion instruments dominate the rhythm section, while the drum set plays a lesser role as an accompanying instrument. Throughout the song there is a polyrhythmic feel that alternates between 6/8 and 3/4. I chose to notate the score in 6/8 because it seemed to coincide with the timeline played in the hand percussion. The traditional timeline used is a derivative of the well-known ‘standard African time pattern.’ (See Example 4, p. 67.) The rhythms of “Uhuru Kwanza” are not necessarily from any specific traditional group, instead Weston’s rhythm section creates a synthesis of African rhythms, drawn on from their own individual cultures to create a traditional sounding rhythmic feel.

Further traditional African music traits can be seen in the function of the percussion section. The percussion section functions like an African drum ensemble for the entire movement. In the opening forty-eight measures, bongos, a shaker, jawbones, and a drum set, act as the accompaniment. The drum set, though not normally part of a traditional drum ensemble, performs a function similar to the African hourglass tension drum.

This is accomplished by using the high tom as the high tone of the hourglass drum and the low tom as the low tone of the hourglass drum.⁶⁷ The accompanying instruments play continuously repeating rhythms while a low-pitched drum, acting as a master drum or leader, plays a changing rhythm in an improvised soloistic fashion. This ensemble structure and the roles played by each instrument are consistent with the roles of instruments in the drum ensembles of the Ewe people in Ghana and Togo, and of the Dundun drum ensembles of the Yoruba in Nigeria. In both traditions, a large low-pitched drum functions as the master drum. The drummer plays an improvised solo part while the remaining drums and idiophones provide a relatively stable accompaniment.⁶⁸ It is thus evident that the percussion section of Weston's piece functions in the same way as a traditional West African drum ensemble; specifically those of Ewe and Yoruba tradition.

The bass and piano enter in measure forty-nine and they present a repeating theme based on a scale played in stepwise motion. This repeating melodic theme creates an ostinato played in polyrhythm and metric hemiola with the rhythmic groove that is set-up by the rhythm section. The hemiola occurs because the rhythm section is phrasing its eighth notes in groups of three while the bass and piano are phrasing eighth notes in groups of two. This interaction creates the feeling of the meters 6/8 and 3/4 being phrased simultaneously. While this is a melodic theme, it interacts rhythmically with the rhythm section. The polyrhythmic interaction of melodic material plays an important role in traditional African music and Weston displays his interpretation of that technique here.

The melodic theme represented by a whole-tone scale is repeated six times and then transposed down a half step and repeated four more times, thus all twelve pitches are utilized in the repeated ostinato. The repeated whole tone pattern utilized here as an ostinato is significant because it was a rhythmic technique prevalent in jazz composition at the time and it created a release from the constraints of Western harmony allowing the composer and performers to focus on the groove and other rhythmic aspects of the composition.

I would like to note that the melodic theme has a two-measure repetition. This is significant because while most jazz compositions of the time focused on four measure phrases creating eight or twelve measure sections, Weston uses shorter two measure phrases. The shorter phrases allow him to create more varied sections of six and ten measures. Furthermore, a shorter two-measure phrase is akin to the repeated ostinatos commonly found in African traditional music. Using a two-measure repeated theme also allows for more polyrhythmic interaction between instruments in a traditional African music setting. When you combine many different simple two-measure phrases one on top of another there is the opportunity for greater accurate, and complex polyrhythm.

In Section A, the whole tone theme is presented linearly, in stepwise motion. In section B, Weston takes the whole tone thematic material, and restructures it so that it is utilized with more rhythmic variation. He also utilizes it harmonically, first in the bass and piano that accompany the melody of section B1 and then in the horns when B2 is stated. Sections C1 and C2 are a further development of the whole tone material first stated in section A.

Weston's use of the whole tone scale is significant for two reasons. First, the whole tone scale was a particular favorite of Thelonious Monk, there is no doubt that Weston is drawing on Monk's influence by using the whole tone material.⁶⁹ Second, it is a six-note symmetric scale, meaning that all of the notes are equally spaced apart. This is significant because symmetric scales are often found in traditional African music. Nketia identifies four, five, six, and seven-tone "equidistant" scales in both instrumental and vocal music throughout Africa.⁷⁰ The six-note equidistant scales used in traditional African music are also whole tone scales and it is more than likely that Weston is drawing upon the information he has gathered to compose using an equidistant scale with this in mind.

In sections C1 and C2 the trombones provide a harsh non-conventional timbre in the horn section that references back to the influence of Ellington. The use of the trombones in these sections is similar to the way Ellington utilized his brass players to symbolize the primitive and savage aspects of Africa through music. Weston may have also been trying to produce the sound of African horns such as the Kakaki, a royal trumpet used by the Hausa of Nigeria. Furthermore, listening to an array of recorded examples of solo and ensemble horns, it is evident that unique and individualized timbre production is important in West African horn tonal production.⁷¹ Weston listened to many recordings of traditional African music at the time, and these examples, coupled with the influence of Ellington's group were most certainly an influence on "Uhuru Kwanza."

Weston's Musical Transition

When listening to "Uhuru Kwanza", recorded in 1959, there is no question that it is Weston's interpretation of traditional African music. However, soon after releasing the album Weston took two trips to Nigeria as part of a U.S. cultural delegation. The first trip was in 1961 and the second was in 1963. An interesting transformation occurred in Weston's music due to his trips to Africa. Upon his return to America after his second visit to Nigeria, Weston recorded and released the Album *Highlife: Music from the New African Nations*.

This album presents a decidedly more popular style of African music. I suggest that the change in musical style is due to the fact that *Uhuru Afrika* was recorded before Weston went to Nigeria. His musical sources were from America; his influential parents, African musicians in America, and tapes from UN delegates. These were most likely more traditional sources because African musicians in America were expected to showcase the 'exotic' side of African traditional music to their American audiences.

Like wise, UN officials, when asked for musical examples, may have also felt obligated to showcase the more traditional musics of their countries in order to feel that they were representing their nations respectfully. However, when Weston went to Nigeria and visited with musicians in Lagos, he was able to hear the popular music of urban West Africans. This popular music would have been much closer in spirit to the American jazz that was happening at the same time. In a personal interview, Weston states that his trips to Africa provided him with the first opportunity to hear African highlife, and to interact with highlife musicians.⁷²

During his two trips, Weston interacted with local musicians. He played with popular musicians such as Fela Kuti in Lagos.⁷³ Additionally, in the introduction to a solo performance at the *2005 Symposium of Composition in Africa and the Diaspora*, Weston states that he hung out with Bobby Benson, a famous highlife musician, at his club the Caban Bamboo. Upon his return to the US, after his second trip, he recorded and released *Highlife*. This recording shows the influence of the Nigerian popular music that Weston was exposed to on his trip. The album contains seven songs, five by Weston and the previously mentioned works by Bobby Benson and Guy Warren. The entire album features a decidedly highlife inspired rhythmic groove, with the exception of Warren's "Mystery of Love" which features a more traditional rhythmic pattern. The first track on the recording, "Caban Bamboo Highlife" represents the album's highlife inspired theme well. A transcription of the first statement of the melody is presented in Appendix 2, in order to facilitate a comparison to "Uhuru Kwanza," the first movement of *Uhuru Afrika*.

"Caban Bamboo Highlife"⁷⁴

While "Uhuru Kwanza" represented Weston's attempt to merge traditional African music with jazz, "Caban Bamboo Highlife" is unmistakably influenced by the West African popular music called highlife. The melody is written in the popular song form AABA, which is a form that is common in standard jazz repertoire, but is also common in highlife. Speaking on the subject of typical highlife melodic forms Agawu states, "At its most basic, it borrows from the outline of a popular melody or hymn tune."⁷⁵ This is certainly the case for Weston's "Caban Bamboo." The melody of Weston's piece is a simple diatonic theme in the key of F. The simplicity of the melody is also characteristic of highlife tunes, which are often short diatonic phrases.⁷⁶

The first A section is played in thirds by the horns. Upon its restatement, the piano performs it in thirds. Finally the last A section is a combination of the first and second, with the piano playing the melody for the first four bars and the horns finishing it off. As discussed in the previous section, Weston employs this technique often.⁷⁷ Varying the instrumental texture on the melody provides an interesting contrast of timbre for the repeat of a melody that, in standard jazz settings is often repeated without change each time it is performed.

The performance of the A sections in thirds is significant to Weston's interpretation of highlife music. It is a further indication that Weston understands the significance of traditional African tonal organization in the popular highlife music. In highlife, the presentation of a melody in thirds is a reference to the singing technique used in traditional Akan singing.⁷⁸ Although Weston learned his interpretation of highlife in Nigeria, and the Akan are located in Ghana, the fact that Weston discovered the technique of performing highlife melodies in thirds is an indication of the importance of that technique. Furthermore, it shows an important connectedness that African popular music has throughout West Africa.

The Bridge, or B section of Weston's "Caban Bamboo," features a repeated two-measure call and response figure by the horns, while the piano and bass perform a four measure repeated harmonic figure with a common root movement in fourths. The call and response in the horns can be identified as retention of traditional call and response techniques common in African music. The harmonic movement is more typical of popular music and derives its origins from Western classical music, in this case most likely acquired through Weston's jazz education. However, the merger of traditional African call and response with Western harmony is again an important identifying factor in highlife, as much as it is an identifying factor in jazz.

In the 1963 recording of "Caban Bamboo," Weston used a highlife rhythmic pattern in the percussion section rather than a traditional rhythmic pattern. The difference between the rhythmic pattern used in "Caban Bamboo" and the one present in "Uhuru Kwanza" is that the drum set in "Caban Bamboo" fulfills a dominant role in the rhythm section, rather than the hand drum and percussion dominated rhythm section found in "Uhuru Kwanza". Furthermore, while "Caban Bamboo" still features some aspects of traditional African rhythm, including an underlying standard time pattern, it is equally accompanied by the steady bass drum beat found in the drum set, and the repeated eighth notes in the shaker. In "Caban Bamboo" the standard time pattern is played on a medium range drum, which possesses neither the bell's ability to be heard over the percussion section, nor the authority of a low sounding master drum. In a traditional setting, the standard time pattern would take precedence; the master drummer often initiates it, and a highly audible bell sustains it. Therefore, in the example of "Caban Bamboo" Weston demonstrates his understanding of the role of traditional African rhythm in popular music, and the fact that it continues to be sounded, but plays a more subtle or integrated role in the overall structure of the music.

Weston's understanding of African popular music is further displayed by the fact that "Caban Bamboo" is performed in a simple 4/4 meter with limited polyrhythm. The result is a rhythm section that functions closer to that of the jazz rhythm section. This is in contrast to "Uhuru Kwanza" where there was a high degree of polyrhythm in both the percussion section and the band.

Finally, in “Uhuru Kwanza”, the horns function significantly as added timbre providing an Ellingtonian-like image of African jungle horns, while the piano performs the main melodic role. However, for “Caban Bamboo” the horns function more like a highlife band horn section. The soprano saxophone and trumpet carry the majority of the melody while the low brass and reeds supply harmonic interjections.

One might ask, why did Weston choose to incorporate popular African music along with traditional African music in his recordings after visiting Nigeria? The answer can be found in the significance of this comparison. Before Weston was able to visit Africa for himself he was forced to rely on second hand information about the place he considered his homeland. The information he was able to acquire left him with a fairly accurate perception of traditional African music. However, once Weston was able to experience Africa for himself, his view of the complex nature of African society became much more accurate. Furthermore, he was able to depict the complex cultural aspects in his music. It was clear to Weston that traditional African music and culture still existed. For example, he was able to experience performances of traditional music at cultural centers on his trip, and he took short excursions to rural villages to hear traditional music performances.⁷⁹ However, Weston also spent significant time in Lagos, one of the most populated cities in Africa. He went to nightclubs every night and interacted with highlife musicians. There is a similarity between jazz musicians and highlife musicians. It is only natural that Weston would find a much closer relationship to highlife musicians and their music than he would with traditional African musicians.

It is because of his trips to Africa that Weston was able to experience for himself the true nature of his spiritual homeland. This experience did not dissuade his use of traditional African material; it reinforced it. However, his trip also provided him with the knowledge that there were many different kinds of music being performed in Africa, and he took advantage of his newfound knowledge by incorporating both traditional and popular African music into his work throughout the 1960s.

Conclusion

This examination of the influences and the music of Randy Weston depicts a complicated interaction of many different elements of African and African American culture that came together in a very specific way to shape his life and music. No other person has been influenced in exactly the same way that Weston has. However, his influences, experiences, and political and musical philosophies are similar to those of other jazz musicians who lived at the same time.

The cultural environment in America from the time of the Harlem Renaissance through the Civil Rights movement was such that African Americans sought to connect with their African roots. Weston was greatly influenced by this period of time. Due in large part to his father's consistent concerns to instill the importance of recognizing his African heritage, Weston gravitated towards the use of traditional African music in jazz, as did other musicians of his era.

Weston's experience however, was significantly different than that of other jazz musicians for one very important reason. While Weston grew up and worked in New York City like many of his contemporaries, he had the uncommon fortune and opportunity to travel to Africa. That opportunity was one that only a few other jazz musicians were given. Furthermore, he took his trips during an exciting time in African history, when many nations were gaining their independence, and cultural activities flourished. Finally, his journeys occurred at an optimum time in his life, a time when he was most prepared musically and intellectually to absorb the complex social systems and cultural activity in Africa that was a direct result of the merger of traditional and modern cultures of the time.

Randy Weston's journey—a journey that began with his parents' cultural awareness and ended in Africa—transformed him into the mature man and musician he eventually became. The journey began with other peoples' perceptions of Africa and African music, but it culminated with Weston's own experiences of Africa and his subsequent readjustment of his impression of African culture and music. As a result, he was able to gain a unique understanding of the music of his forefathers, and he has continued to spread the ideas and images of the complex nature of African society and culture through his music.

The decision to integrate African music with jazz was not an easy process for Weston; in fact he has had to endure many hardships along the way. Weston discusses some of the struggles he has had to endure stating, "Africa was a place to be ashamed of. [Africa was misrepresented] in the Hollywood movies, and in the educational system," so playing an integrated music of jazz and African music left Weston in a lonely position for many years. "People considered Europe to be the highpoint of civilization." His choice to integrate the two musics placed him in an "unpopular position at times," states Weston, "but you have to do what you have to do."⁸⁰ Although it has been a very long process for Weston, he understands that it is important to understand African history and heritage as it relates to American history and heritage. This understanding is the first step to improving the lives of African Americans.

Understanding the life and music of Randy Weston is equally important because it provides further awareness of the importance of the African heritage to Americans. Recognition of the existence of an African history and the vital part it has played and continues to play in the shaping of American culture is the next step to true equality in America.

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Weston, Randy. *Blues To Africa*. Freedom 40153. © 1974. Compact Disc, Freedom 741014, 1988.

Notes

¹ J.H. Kwanbena Nketia, "The Study of African and Afro-American Music" *Black Perspectives in Music* 1:1, (Spring 1973), 9.

² *Ibid*, 8.

³ For more information on Marcus Garvy's concept of Pan-Africanism see Samuel A. Floyd Jr., *The Power of Black Music*, New York; Oxford University Press, 1995.

⁴ Personal Interview with the Author

⁵ Russ Musto, "African Rhythms" *All About Jazz*, (February 2004) <http://www.allaboutjazz.com>. (Accessed September 26, 2006).

⁶ Weston, personal interview with Jason Squinobal, 03/26/2007.

⁷ Russ Musto, "African Rhythms" *All About Jazz*, (February 2004) <http://www.allaboutjazz.com>. (Accessed September 26, 2006)

⁸ I. Gitler "Randy Weston," *Down Beat* issue 31.6 1964 p 36.

⁹ Fred Bouchard, "Randy Weston's Pan-African Revival" *Downbeat*, November 1990, p.20

¹⁰ Musto, "African Rhythms," February 2004

¹¹ Ted Panken "African Soul" *Down Beat*, October 1, 1998, p.20

¹² Bouchard, "Randy Weston's Pan-African Revival," p.20

¹³ Musto, "African Rhythms" *All About Jazz*, February 2004

¹⁴ Ellington, *Music is My Mistress*, 109.

¹⁵ Randy Weston's Website, <http://www.randyweston.info/randy-weston-welcome.html>, accessed 02/22/07.

¹⁶ Valerie Wilmer, *Jazz People*, (New York; Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, inc. 1970,) 48.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 48-49.

¹⁸ Personal Communication with Dr. Nathan Davis, spring 2007.

¹⁹ Monk and Hawkins may seem like a strange fit, however, though the older tenor man played in a traditional swing-era style that was not in vogue at the time, he prided himself in hiring young, modern musicians. "Monk was one of [Hawkins's] favorite young players" and he often defended Monk against his detractors, of which there were many. Gourse, *Straight, No Chaser*, 35.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 77.

²¹ Gourse, *Straight, No Chaser*, 77.

²² *Ibid*, 79.

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- ²³ Ted Panken “African Soul” *Down Beat*, (October 1, 1998,) 20.
- ²⁴ *Ibid*, 20.
- ²⁵ Bouchard, “Randy Weston’s Pan-African Revival,” 21.
- ²⁶ Gourse, *Straight, No Chaser*, 80.
- ²⁷ *Ibid*, 79.
- ²⁸ Leslie Gourse, *Straight, No Chaser: the Life and Genius of Thelonious Monk*. (New York; Schirmer Books, 1997), 78
- ²⁹ Shipton, *New History of Jazz*, 831.
- ³⁰ Panken “African Soul,” 20.
- ³¹ Musto, “African Rhythms” *All About Jazz*.
- ³² Musto, “African Rhythms” *All About Jazz*.
- ³³ Bouchard, “Randy Weston’s Pan-African Revival,” 20.
- ³⁴ Ted Panken “African Soul,” 20.
- ³⁵ Charles Kiel and Steven Feld, *Music Grooves*, (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- ³⁶ Panken “African Soul,” 20.
- ³⁷ Gitler “Randy Weston,” p17.
- ³⁸ Willard Jenkins, “Freeing His Roots” *Down Beat* (February 2005)
- ³⁹ Panken “African Soul,” p.20

⁴⁰ Many Jazz Musicians composed politically charged music during the civil rights movements and many of these works were extended, multi-movement compositions. Jazz musicians with works featuring a message of Civil Rights include John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*, Sonny Rollins' *Freedom Suite*, Max Roach's *We Insist, Freedom Now Suite*, Charles Mingus' "Fables of Faubus," and Billy Holliday's "Strange Fruit."

⁴¹ Willard Jenkins, "Freeing His Roots."

⁴² Laurent Goddet, "Interview With Randy Weston," *Coda*, Issue 159 (February 1978), 9.

⁴³ Jenkins, "Freeing His Roots."

⁴⁴ "South Africa Bans Recordings by Lena Horne, Randy Weston," *Downbeat*, September 24, 1964, p. 4. Posted on Weston, Randy. Website. <http://www.randyweston.info/randy-westonwelcome.html>, accessed 02/22/07

⁴⁵ Personal Communication with Dr. Akin Euba Fall 2006.

⁴⁶ Akin Euba, "Intercultural expressions in Neo-African Art Music" *Essays on African Music 2: Intercultural Perspectives*, (Bayreuth: Eckhard Breiting, 1989), 117.

⁴⁷ Kofi Agawu *Representing African Music*, 8.

⁴⁸ Kofi Agawu *Representing African Music*, 6.

⁴⁹ Ronnie Graham, *The Da Capo Guide to Contemporary African Music*. (London: Da Capo Press, 1988), 15.

⁵⁰ Akin Euba, "Towards an African Pianism" *Intercultural Musicology* 1 (Oct. 1999), 10.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 10.

⁵² The actual process of identifying and naming classical music is at times problematic. Other terms include, Art music, serious music, and intellectual music.

⁵³ Akin Euba, "Intercultural expressions in Neo-African Art Music," 115.

⁵⁴ Weston uses this arranging technique on a number of different compositions and its importance is discussed below.

⁵⁵ Highlife is twentieth century music style originating in Ghana but popular throughout West Africa particularly during the 1950s and 60s.

⁵⁶ Robert Palmer, “The Musical Roots of Randy Weston,” *Rolling Stone*, 30 (October 1980), 25.

⁵⁷ Kofi Agawu, “Structural Analysis or Cultural Analysis? Competing Perspectives on the ‘Standard Time Pattern’ of West African Rhythm”, *Journal of American Musicological Society*, 59:1 (2006).

⁵⁸ The Anlo Ewe are an ethnic group that occupy a region of West Africa near the Eastern border of Ghana and into Togo.

⁵⁹ J.H. Kwabena Nketia, *The Music of Africa*, (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1974).

⁶⁰ George Dor, *Tonal Resources and Compositional Processes of Ewe Traditional Vocal Music*, (PHD Dissertation University of Pittsburgh, 2001), 111.

⁶¹ Dor, *Tonal Resources and Compositional Processes*, 126.

⁶² I am not implying that Ewe vocalists would sing in the same manner that Weston is playing. I simply intend to show that Weston is organizing his pitch selection in a way that it functions similarly to that of Ewe vocalists.

⁶³ Dor, *Tonal Resources and Compositional Processes*, 126-129.

⁶⁴ Robert L. Doerschuk. “Randy Weston: Back to the Fountain” *88: The Greats of Jazz Piano*, (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2001).

⁶⁵ Weston composed “Lagos” in celebration of his trip to Nigeria in 1963. The composition was written on an airplane as Weston was traveling to Nigeria, in an interview he states that the opening rhythms are intended to imitate the rhythm of the airplane engine.

⁶⁶ For all music examples of “Uhuru Kwanza” please see Appendix 1.

⁶⁷ Known by many different names, the hourglass tension drum is one of the most popular traditional drums of Africa and plays an important role in many different ensembles as both leader and accompanying instrument.

⁶⁸ The information given on African Drum ensembles comes from my own personal performance experience, personal communications with Dr. Akin Euba, Anicet Mundundu and Steve Gbolonyo.

⁶⁹ In a personal interview with Weston, he states that his use of the whole tone scale in *Uhuru Afrika* comes from his study of Thelonious Monk's music. Weston, personal interview with Jason Squinobal, 03/26/2007.

⁷⁰ Nketia, *The Music of Africa*, 116-119.

⁷¹ What is thought of as a 'clear' and 'pure' tone in terms of Western aesthetics is considered incomplete in many African societies.

⁷² Weston, personal interview with Jason Squinobal, 03/26/2007.

⁷³ Weston, personal interview with Jason Squinobal, 03/26/2007.

⁷⁴ For all music examples of "Caban Bamboo please see Appendix 2.

⁷⁵ Agawu, *Representing African Music*, 130.

⁷⁶ Agawu, *Representing African Music*, 130.

⁷⁷ See the example of "Congolese Children"

⁷⁸ Agawu *Representing African Music*, 131.

⁷⁹ Information supplied from introductions to compositions, at the 2005 Symposium of Composition in Africa and the Diaspora, organized by Akin Euba.

⁸⁰ Weston, personal interview with Jason Squinobal, 03/26/2007.

Uhuru Kwanza

♩. = 130

Transcribed by Jason Squinobal

Musical score for measures 1-6. The score is written for four instruments: Maracas, Jawbone, Bongo Drums, and Congo Drums. The Maracas part consists of a steady eighth-note pattern. The Jawbone part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Bongo Drums part has a complex, syncopated eighth-note pattern. The Congo Drums part provides a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

Musical score for measures 7-12. The score is written for four instruments: Mrs., Jaw., Bgo. Dr., and C. Dr. The Mrs. part continues with the eighth-note pattern from the first system. The Jaw. part continues with its rhythmic eighth-note pattern. The Bgo. Dr. part continues with its complex eighth-note pattern. The C. Dr. part continues with its steady eighth-note accompaniment.

Musical score for measures 13-18. The score is written for five instruments: D. S., Mrs., Jaw., Bgo. Dr., and C. Dr. The D. S. part is a new melodic line. The Mrs., Jaw., Bgo. Dr., and C. Dr. parts continue with their respective rhythmic patterns from the previous systems.