



**Smith, Wadada Leo / Myers, Amina Claudine**  
**Central Park's Mosaics of Reservoir, Lake, Paths**  
**Gardens**

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## Now and Then

Left to their own devices, having been separated through circumstance, certain lifelines have a way of reconnecting. It's more than social media or chat groups, it's a kind of natural gravitational energy, an internal dynamic specific to heavy spirits. A propensity to find the right moment to reconvene.

Wadada Leo Smith and Amina Claudine Myers both became Chicagoans by way of the South – Smith arriving from Mississippi, Myers from Arkansas. In Chicago they helped forge a world of new music as key first-wave members of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), an organization that soon expanded nationally, sending inspiration and emissaries – including both of them – to all parts of the American creative arts landscape. Myers, who famously appeared in the second AACM concert, with Philip Cohran's Artistic Heritage Ensemble at the South Shore Ballroom in 1966, preceded Smith by a year or so. While he was studying at the Sherwood Music School at the Fine Arts Building in the Loop, Smith became active in the AACM, where he grew into one of its most important philosophers and composers; like many AACMers, he spent a period in Europe before moving to Connecticut and California, sharing his own version of concepts germinated in the AACM. Myers left Chicago for New York in 1976, collaborating with multitudes and participating in a richly varied array of musical projects. Both of them are officially global musicians, not defined by a geographic plot point.

Leap forward to "Amina Claudine Myers," a piece written by Smith for his friend and AACM-mate, recorded in a 2015 version for his Great Lakes Quartet (featuring Henry Threadgill, Jack DeJohnette, and John Lindberg) and again for solo trumpet in 2016. The admiration and respect were clear in both versions of this radiant dedication. Which sets us up for the recording at hand, itself a radiant kind of mutual dedication – a dedication that arises from a half-century of personal dedication, the sort of commitment to develop and grow with which improvising musicians forge ahead, steadily, into the unknown. A meeting of two great spirits, a gathering of their combined forces explored in the present tense, a natural reconvening.

## Gravity and Depth

The lesson is: good things take time. There is no rush. Can't. Hurry. Love. Just. Have. To. Wait. The fierce urgency of now will work itself out with patience. This is true not only of the concept

of working and recording together, but of the music itself. Central Park has a considered quality, a slowness that both gives it depth and is evidence of the gravity of its makers. From Myers' opening notes on "Conservatory Gardens," in which she gradually spells out harmonic terrain, the program unfolds as a series of elegant, sometimes elegiac, episodes. A tributary of trust. A delta of decisiveness. A slow-moving stream of sensitivity.

The measured pace allows the proceeding to gather weight. Chords sit in space. They sink in. All the way. This is no shimmering surface. It's deep. Metaphors of gravity and depth circle one another, conspiring to explain the resonance, like the weight of a foot on a sustain pedal or the insertion of a Harmon mute into the trumpet. A track can be joyous or melancholy, or, as on several, it can mix these emotions in a difficult-to-describe way, but, in any case, it comes with a kind of profundity that only experience engenders. Those lifelines have led Myers and Smith through so many different kinds of situation that one sound on each instrument is enough to open up a portal on those scenes – from blues to church to pop to funk to jazz to creative music in every manifestation. One encounters such elemental experience in this work as an imbrication, a deeply placed feeling and understanding, rather than as a genre pastiche. As we've noted, this not quick and superficial music; it moves deliberately from place to place, all points of reference absorbed and redirected without obvious markers, a sort of topographic map of oceanic depths.

### **Buoyancy and Light**

For all its freight, Central Park has a lightness as well, a translucency, a buoyancy. Of course, Smith's sound, in which he projects illumination straight out of the bell as if it was a flashlight, is a major source of uplift. On the two beautiful tributes that close the record, this open sound is in magnificent display. One (fittingly subtitled "A Meditation on Light") is dedicated to saxophonist Albert Ayler, the other a surprise smile at John Lennon. Both men were public advocates for peace, Ayler articulating his perspective by way of ferocity and lament, Lennon by way of lyrics and persona. At the core of Smith's tone is an implication of peacefulness. A flurry of notes may contain fervent energy, but the tone is still there, and in it a case is made for social justice by means of peacefulness. It's all there in the sound of a trumpet, through which a whole life is blown. A perfect complement, on the solo piano piece "When Was" Myers shows her nimble-fingered jubilation, also in her cool organ sound, as buoyant as a life raft, keeping listeners safely above turbulent water.

In both cases, peacefulness is not offered as limpness or passivity. The meditative path can be a hard fought one, with passages of dissonance and struggle. And regret. Or longing. These are complex colors, not new age truisms. As buoyant and light as the music may be, as heavy and

deep, it is most of all rich. Thinking back on those formative years in Chicago, the past unearthed and brought fully forward, this first set of duets is like a little manifesto of its own on how to approach creative art, a master class in invention and exchange...

## Capacity and Expression

...and opening outward as well as inward. The penumbral glow of their collaboration suggests a capacity for wisdom, a kind of expressivity that exists without being forced, reminding the listener that one's ability to express is directly related to that capacity, the opening up to the universe, a turning around of the universe to face the crowd by way of one's capacious understanding, an understanding that Wadada Leo Smith and Amina Claudine Myers have come to independently and interdependently across decades in disparate places that land here and now in Central Park, a central spot, a convention center for the reconvening of heavy spirits and sympathetic souls.

John Corbett, Chicago, July 2023

## Featured artist

Myers, Amina Claudine

## Band member

Amina Claudine Myers                      Piano / Hammond B3  
Wadada Leo Smith                              Trumpet

## Producer

Sun Chung

## aufnahmestudio

Sear Sound, New York

## Mastering

Alex Bonney

## Phonotrphy

Arianna Tae Cimarosti, Luke  
Marantz

## Cover Artwork

Laura Arteaga Charlton

## Tracklist

- |    |   |       |
|----|---|-------|
| 1. | Conservatory Gardens<br>M: Wadada Leo Smith                 | 09:02 |
| 2. | Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Reservoir<br>M: Wadada Leo Smith | 01:52 |
| 3. | Central Park at Sunset<br>M: Wadada Leo Smith               | 05:17 |
| 4. | When Was<br>M: Amina Claudine Myers                         | 05:33 |
| 5. | The Harlem Meer<br>M: Wadada Leo Smith                      | 03:07 |
| 6. | Albert Ayler, a meditation in light<br>M: Wadada Leo Smith  | 06:30 |

7. **Imagine, a mosaic for John Lenon**  
M: Wadada Leo Smith

05:06