

# The Golden Age of Non-Idiomatic Improvisation

FYS 129

David Keffer, Professor  
Dept. of Materials Science & Engineering  
The University of Tennessee  
Knoxville, TN 37996-2100  
dkeffer@utk.edu  
<http://clausius.engr.utk.edu/>

## Various Quotes

These slides contain a collection of some of the quotes largely from the musicians that are studied during the course.

The idea is to present “musicians in their own words”.



# Amina Claudine Myers

**American pianist & vocalist (March 21, 1942 – )**

## George Lewis on Amina Claudine Myers

Amina Claudine Myers is one of the major first-wave members of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, an experimental music collective that included Leo Smith, Muhal Richard Abrams, Fred Anderson, Anthony Braxton, Leroy Jenkins, Thurman Barker, Henry Threadgill, and the future members of the Art Ensemble of Chicago. This group of young working-class artists of the 1960s barged into standard music histories by creating a hybrid of improvisation and composition that redefined the premises of experimental music-making. A virtuoso pianist and organist whose work is presented internationally and appears on scores of recordings, Myers draws upon her backgrounds in classical music and the music of the black church of her native rural South to create a recombinant sensibility within improvisation-imbued extended compositions. Her work is insistently post-genre at a moment when reinscriptive collage pretends to postmodern transgression.

Interview with George Lewis, Bomb Magazine, Vol 97, Fall 2006  
<http://bombmagazine.org/article/2857/amina-claudine-myers>

## George Lewis on African American Women in Creative Music

A number of younger scholars working on new music have noted that widely accepted historicizations appear to premise the very identity of American experimental music upon the erasure of African-American forms, histories, and aesthetics, despite the ongoing centrality of blackness to the international identity of American music. As it happens, the form most often assumed as the “invisible man” of American experimentalism is that of a black woman.

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## Myers on Playing “Totally Open”

**GL:** But what about once you leave the blues and that context, like in the record we made with Muhal in 1980, “Spihumonesty,” with Youseff Yancey playing the theremin? Is there any reason to fear in an open context like that? Or in the duo piano record you made with Muhal?

**Myers:** With Muhal it was totally open, once you got past the reading part. Henry Threadgill’s music is hard, and Roscoe’s [Mitchell] and Leo’s [Smith]. [Anthony] Braxton, his stuff looks hard, but you just have to keep up with the time span. I found that with Leo too. He has some tricky stuff, so you have to keep up. They go for the overall sound. This is what I tell my musicians now—this is just a feeling, don’t worry about the music. The music is a guide; just do your thing. The charts Muhal wrote for the AACM—I was inexperienced, in from the country (laughter), and his music seemed hard. You had to practice.

## Myers on Training Your Brain

**Myers:** Like with Coltrane, when he came out with “Ascension.” Ajaramu came home and put the record on, and I said, Ooh, take that off, it’s too much. Later I realized that with Coltrane all these sounds were going on at the same time, and if you listen, you listen to the complete network of sound, you are able to hear it all together.

...

**Myers:** But if you train yourself to accept things, your brain will adjust.

**GL:** That’s interesting: you have to learn to accept things.

**ACM:** Just close your eyes and you’re surrounded with sound, like with the Art Ensemble. You’re living within the sound, and it takes you places where you’re just dealing with life.

## Myers on Threat of Monoculture to Black Culture

**GL:** You had the classical music training as well as the gospel training, but even a lot of the black cultural writers and celebrities don't pay that much attention to the black classical composers and performers...

**Myers:** They sure don't, and the ones on TV that could promote it don't. Take people like Oprah Winfrey, she's into the Princes and the Patti LaBelles, Halle Berry, which is all good, but that's just one part of it. You don't hear anything about the classical musicians, the composers, the painters. Nothing. We're not projecting the culture.

Interview with George Lewis, Bomb Magazine, Vol 97, Fall 2006 <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2857/amina-claudine-myers>



**Amina Claudine Myers composing at the piano, New York, 1977.**



Image taken from an interview with George Lewis, Bomb Magazine, Vol 97, Fall 2006  
<http://bombmagazine.org/article/2857/amina-claudine-myers>