

= Ten Freedom Summers =

Ten Freedom Summers is a four @-@ disc box set by American trumpeter and composer Wadada Leo Smith, released on May 5, 2012, by Cuneiform Records. Smith wrote its pieces intermittently for 34 years, beginning in 1977, before performing them live in November 2011 at the Colburn School's Zipper Hall in Los Angeles. He was accompanied by the nine @-@ piece Southwest Chamber Music ensemble and his own jazz quartet, featuring drummers Pheeroan akLaff and Susie Ibarra, pianist Anthony Davis, and bassist John Lindberg.

A free jazz and contemporary classical work, Ten Freedom Summers comprises 19 pieces that are mostly fully developed suites. They eschew conventional themes for abstract expressions of the subject matter, which focuses on the Civil Rights Movement and other interrelated topics. Smith cites the segregation of his native Mississippi and playwright August Wilson's The Pittsburgh Cycle as inspirations behind the work. Ten Freedom Summers received widespread critical acclaim and was named a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 2013.

= = Background = =

Smith started Ten Freedom Summers in 1977, when he wrote the piece "Medgar Evers" as an evocation of the eponymous civil rights activist gunned down in Mississippi in 1963. Smith subsequently worked intermittently on the project. He spent 34 years writing it, supported by a series of residencies, grants and commissions, the final one from the Southwest Chamber Music ensemble. He completed the pieces in a flurry of activity between 2009 and 2011. Smith was inspired to assemble the pieces into one group by August Wilson's 10 @-@ play series The Pittsburgh Cycle. Smith has also said of the idea behind Ten Freedom Summers:

"I was born in 1941 and grew up in segregated Mississippi and experienced the conditions which made it imperative for an activist movement for equality. I saw that stuff happening. Those are the moments that triggered this. It was in that same environment that I had my first dreams of becoming a composer and performer."

Ten Freedom Summers was recorded at Zipper Hall in Los Angeles, where Smith performed live for three nights from November 4 to November 6, 2011. He played 19 pieces, accompanied by either his Golden Quartet, the nine @-@ piece Southwest Chamber Music ensemble conducted by Jeff von der Schmidt, or both. Smith's quartet featured drummers Pheeroan akLaff and Susie Ibarra, pianist Anthony Davis, and bassist John Lindberg.

= = Composition = =

Ten Freedom Summers comprises four discs for a total of four @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half hours of music. Most of its 19 pieces were fully developed suites, with three spanning over 20 minutes. According to Smith, there were no recurring motifs throughout. Instead of using his own "Ankhrasation" method of graphic notation, Smith wrote Ten Freedom Summers with a traditionally notated score. His Golden Quartet played music rooted in blues and jazz idioms, and the Southwest Chamber Music ensemble played violin, viola, cello, harp, concert bass, glockenspiel, bass clarinet, flute, tympani, marimba, gongs, and other miscellaneous percussion. In the opinion of All About Jazz writer Mark Redlefsen, Smith's use of echo @-@ laden, atmospheric sounds in his previous work culminated on Ten Freedom Summers, whose somber mood reflected the pieces' titles.

The compositions were organized in three principal sections: "Defining Moments in America", "What Is Democracy?", and "Freedom Summers". Each section's pieces musically described significant figures associated with the African @-@ American Civil Rights Movement during 1954 to 1964 and concepts relevant to the formation of institutions that evolved from human interaction, including government, media, and megacorporations. Jeff Dayton @-@ Johnson from All About Jazz said although its movements "variously address Malcolm X, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Brown vs. Board of Education, Medgar Evers [and] the Little Rock Nine", the "thematic concerns

nevertheless extend ... both backwards ( to the 1857 Dred Scott case ) and forward ( to 9 / 11 ) , and to a series of cross @-@ cutting concerns ( e.g. , democracy , the freedom of the press and the black church ) . "

According to Josh Langhoff from PopMatters , the box set 's pieces " transform their subjects into musical invention and moods ; they ? re not literal or programmatic . " Langhoff finds them similar to contemporary classical pieces in how they " make their points through abstraction . " Daniel Spicer of BBC Music characterized the music as " a mixture of austere contemporary classical composition performed by the LA @-@ based Southwest Chamber Music ensemble , and turbulent free jazz improvised by the Golden Quartet " . In the opinion of jazz critic John Fordham , the presence of either Smith 's jazz quartet or the classical ensemble led him to abandon typical themes and continuous pulses in favor of free jazz and contemporary classical idioms . Bob Rusch believed the performances were not inspired by contemporary Civil Rights Movement music by artists such as Paul Robeson , Pete Seeger , Mahalia Jackson , or Aretha Franklin , because Smith 's Golden Quintet exhibited an astral , chamber sound .

= = Critical reception = =

Ten Freedom Summers received widespread acclaim from critics . At Metacritic , which assigns a normalized rating out of 100 to reviews from mainstream publications , the album received a weighted average score of 99 , based on 8 reviews . In The Guardian , Fordham called it " a landmark in jazz 's rich canon " , while Bill Shoemaker of The Wire deemed it " a monumental evocation of America 's civil rights movement " . Glen Hall of Exclaim ! wrote that " Smith 's music resonates with the suffering and the dreams of a better life that embodied the decade of 1954 to 1964 that is the subject of this powerful compendium of compositions . " AllMusic 's Thom Jurek viewed the box set as Smith 's best work , writing that it " belongs in jazz 's canonical lexicon with Duke Ellington 's Black Brown & Beige and Max Roach 's Freedom Now Suite . " Phil Johnson from The Independent found the music very gratifying , comparing it to if Miles Davis had recorded Ligeti during the 1950s . Langhoff wrote in PopMatters that the set was " about sound : the tangible , physically beautiful sounds of Smith 's imperative trumpet and of different instruments in combination , testing their own limits . " He asserted in conclusion , " In four and a half hours , Wadada Leo Smith writes one of America 's defining events in sound , and the story is all of ours . " In Cadence Magazine , Rusch was less enthusiastic and felt the box set could have benefitted from being released as four separate albums , writing that listening to the record in its entirety was " exhausting , but also involving and inspiring " .

Ten Freedom Summers was ranked as one of the best jazz albums of 2012 by AllMusic , All About Jazz , JazzTimes , and the Chicago Reader . Bret Saunders from The Denver Post named it 2012 's best jazz record , and Down Beat magazine named it their album of the year . It was also ranked number 31 in The Wire 's list of 2012 's best albums . Ten Freedom Summers was one of three finalists for the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for Music , along with Aaron Jay Kernis 's classical composition " Pieces of Winter Sky " and " Partita for 8 Voices " by Caroline Shaw , who ultimately won the award .

= = Track listing = =

All music composed by Wadada Leo Smith .

= = Personnel = =

Credits are adapted from the album 's liner notes .

= = Release history = =