9 | "Diving into the earth": the musical worlds of Julius Eastman

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In her book *The Infinite Line: Re-making Art after Modernism*, Briony Fer considers the dramatic changes to "the map of art" in the 1950s and characterizes the transition away from modernism not as a negation, but as a positive reconfiguration.[1] In examining works from the 1950s and 1960s by visual artists including Piero Manzoni, Eva Hesse, Dan Flavin, Mark Rothko, Agnes Martin, and Louise Bourgeois, Fer suggests that after a modernist aesthetic was exhausted by mid-century, there emerged "strategies of remaking art through repetition," with a shift from a collage aesthetic to a serial one; by "serial," she means "a number of connected elements with a common strand linking them together, often repetitively, often in succession."[2]

Although Fer's use of the term "serial" in visual art differs from that typically employed in discussions about music, her fundamental claim

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[1] Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line: Re-making Art after Modernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).

[2] Ibid., 3.

that "seriality and subjectivity are inextricably bound" is fruitful in thinking about the music of Julius Eastman (1940–90).[3] Her discussion of Hesse's approach to serial repetition as an art that was "personal" resonates with my understanding of Eastman's compositional use of repetition, a process that permits a gradual unfolding of the deliberately politicized sonic field.[4] This politicization is suggested by the titles of some of his untexted compositions, which can redirect one's hearing in specific ways. For example, the title of his haunting *Gay Guerrilla* (1980) invites the listener to engage with a complex set of issues regarding sexuality and politics, a listening experience that is enhanced when we consider Eastman's music in relation to his life as a gay African American who walked on the edges of the American new music scene of the 1960s and 1970s.

A composer, singer, pianist, improviser, conductor, actor, choreographer, and dancer, Eastman is receiving long overdue attention two decades after his death in 1990.[5] In 2005, New World Records released the first commercial recording of Eastman's compositions, a three-CD set containing seven pieces and a pre-concert talk he delivered at Northwestern University in 1980.[6] This collection brought many new listeners to his music and resulted in performances across the US and internationally. The recent revival of Eastman's music includes performances in New York at The Stone, The Kitchen, and Merkin Hall; in Los Angeles at the Roy and Edna Disney/Calarts Theater; in Berkeley at the Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive; and in The Hague at City Hall Atrium.[7]

Eastman was not widely known as a composer during his lifetime, but he was recognized in new music circles as a brilliant singer and pianist. Possessing an expressively rich voice, he was perhaps best known, before the recent revival of his compositions, for his landmark performance of Peter Maxwell Davies's vocal tour-de-force, *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (1969), which he premiered in the US in 1970, recorded in

[3] Ibid., 4. [4] Ibid., 18.

[5] To this list, Renée Levine Packer adds mime, actor, electronicist, organist, and speaker. See Renée Levine Packer, *This Life of Sounds: Evenings for New Music in Buffalo* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 92.

[6] Julius Eastman, *Unjust Malaise* (New World Records 80638-2, 2005).

[7] S.E.M. Ensemble, The Stone, New York, July 25, 2006; The Kitchen, Nights Errant, New York, April 11, 2008; Ecstatic Music Festival, Merkin Hall, New York, January 17, 2011; California E.A.R. Unit, Roy and Edna Disney/Calarts Theater, Los Angeles, April 11, 2007; A Tribute to Julius Eastman, Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive, February 10, 2012; and Dag in de Branding, Festival voor Nieuwe Muziek, City Hall Atrium, The Hague, March 15, 2008.

1973, and performed at one of Boulez's New York Philharmonic's Rug Concerts in 1975.[8] Eastman's dazzling performance of this work, which spans some five octaves and requires extraordinarily challenging avant-garde vocal techniques, is all the more remarkable in light of his lack of formal training in voice.[9] This bravura performance resulted in a Grammy nomination, and many new music aficionados know Eastman's singing through this album.[10]

My examination of Eastman's work is an attempt to make his "formalist language *signify*," borrowing a phrase from Robert Fink's *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice*.[11] Eastman's approaches to organizing sound, including his use of pitch, rhythm, repetition, and musical quotation in his instrumental compositions, can be heard as grounded in the politics of racial and sexual identity that, in the wake of the Civil Rights movement and Stonewall, pushed the envelope in new music circles starting in the 1970s. I argue that post-minimalist compositional strategies were profoundly enabling for Eastman, allowing him to write into his music a kind of *expressive* freedom that emerged from his subjectivity as a gay African American composer of new music. His work thus allows us to respond affirmatively to a key question animating Fer's study: "Could it be that art is one of the very few places in culture that allows a margin of freedom within repetition rather than a place exempt from its demands?"[12]

In discussing his approaches to organizing music, including his use of repetition and ideas about form, I share my response as a listener attuned to aspects of his personhood—specifically as a black, gay man who worked in a primarily white new music scene—that I believe can be usefully linked to his music. It is critical, in my view, to apprehend Eastman's music with respect to both of these social categories, rather

[8] Kyle Gann, "'Damned Outrageous': The Music of Julius Eastman," liner notes, Eastman, *Unjust Malaise*; advertisement for Rug Concert—New York Philharmonic, Pierre Boulez, conductor, June 28, 1975, in *New York Magazine*, June 9, 1975, 80; Peter Maxwell Davies, *Eight Songs for a Mad King*, with Julius Eastman, voice, and The Fires of London (Nonesuch H 71285, 1973).

[9] Frances Eastman, interview with the author (Ithaca, NY: March 7, 2009).

[10] Mary Jane Leach, "In Search of Julius Eastman," NewMusicBox (November 8, 2005), www.newmusicbox.org/articles/In-Search-of-Julius-Eastman (accessed 23 November 2012).

[11] Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 18. Fink's use of "signify" does not invoke Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s theory of Signifyin(g), as elaborated in Gates's *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Eastman's spoken introduction to a concert of his music at Northwestern University, on January 16, 1980, is a form of Signifyin(g), as I discuss later in this essay.

[12] Fer, *The Infinite Line*, 4.

than to disregard them within a "post-race" or sexuality-neutral context. In a 1976 interview, Eastman reflected, "[P]laying the piano, singing or composing helps me to get closer to myself. It's through art that I can search for the self. . . When I am playing this music, I feel as if I am trying to see myself—it's like diving into the earth."[13] To ignore race and sexuality, which for Eastman were markers of "difference," in listening to his music would be to refuse to acknowledge critical parts of the self for which Eastman was searching. His destabilizing of aspects of the American new music scene in the 1970s and 1980s can be heard as an expression of what Cathy J. Cohen regards as an interconnected political identity, one "informed by a consciousness that. . .grows from the living experience of existing within and resisting multiple and connected practices of domination and normalization."[14] This essay examines some of Eastman's compositional responses to two overlapping systems of oppression, racism and homophobia. His music, often generated through repetition, sonically illustrates not only the suggestive links Fer makes between freedom and repetition and between seriality and subjectivity, but also the theoretical framework that interprets formal structures through a subjectivity of difference more generally.[15]

"To obtain wisdom"

Very little scholarly work is available on Eastman. There is no article on him in the twenty-nine-volume *New Grove Dictionary of Music and*

[13] Renate Strauss, "Julius Eastman: Will the Real One Stand Up?" *Buffalo Evening News* (July 17, 1976): B-5.

[14] Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3:4 (1997): 441; repr. in E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, eds., *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 21–51.

[15] This approach is illustrated in a number of studies published since 1990, including Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Philip Brett, "Britten's Dream," in Ruth A. Solie, ed., *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 259–80; Ellie M. Hisama, "Voice, Race, and Sexuality in the Music of Joan Armatrading," in Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamessley, eds., *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity, and Music* (Zurich: Carciofoli Verlagshaus, 1999), 115–32; Ellie M. Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism: The Music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Mary Lee Greitzer, "Queer Responses to Sexual Trauma: The Voices of Tori Amos's 'Me and a Gun' and Lydia Lunch's 'Daddy Dearest'," *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 17 (2013): 1–26.

Musicians, 2nd edition (2001) or in the recently published eight-volume *Grove Dictionary of American Music*, 2nd edition (2013).[16] To my knowledge, the only published scholarly work on Eastman is Andrew Hanson-Dvoracek's master's thesis (2011) and Ryan Dohoney's essay on Cage and Eastman (2014), in addition to composer Mary Jane Leach's watershed article "In Search of Julius Eastman," published in NewMusicBox (2005) and Kyle Gann's extensive liner notes to Julius Eastman, *Unjust Malaise* (2005). A volume of essays on Eastman edited by former Creative Associates co-director Renée Levine Packer and Mary Jane Leach is in preparation.[17] The following discussion contributes to the biography of Eastman, drawing from three interviews I conducted with his mother, Frances Eastman, an interview I conducted with David Borden, and my archival research at the University at Buffalo and use of archival records housed at the Curtis Institute.

Julius Dunbar Eastman, Jr. was born in New York City on October 27, 1940, named after his father and after the poet Paul Laurence Dunbar.[18] Julius Eastman, Sr. was a civil engineer and his mother, Frances Eastman, worked as an inspector for General Electric, and later as the Records Librarian at the Tompkins County Hospital, raising Julius and his younger brother Gerry by herself in Ithaca, New York, after she and her husband split up (see Figure 9.1).[19] When Julius was a boy, he and his mother visited Manhattan and walked by a music store;

[16] Stanley Sadie, ed., *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd edn. (New York: Grove, 2001); Charles Hiroshi Garrett, ed., *The Grove Dictionary of American Music*, 2nd edn. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[17] Andrew Hanson-Dvoracek, "Julius Eastman's 1980 Residency at Northwestern University," MA thesis, University of Iowa, 2011; Ryan W. Dohoney, "John Cage, Julius Eastman, and the Homosexual Ego," in Benjamin Piekut, ed., *Tomorrow Is the Question: New Directions in Experimental Music Studies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 39–62; Leach, "In Search of Julius Eastman"; Gann, "'Damned Outrageous'"; Renée Levine Packer and Mary Jane Leach, eds., "Gay Guerrilla: The Life and Music of Julius Eastman" (unpublished ms). Levine Packer and Leach have done a significant amount of research on Eastman, and Leach's website houses an archive of scores and photographs. See Levine Packer, "Julius Eastman," in Levine Packer and Leach, eds., "Gay Guerrilla"; and Leach, The Julius Eastman Project, www.mjleach.com/eastman.htm (accessed June 30, 2014).

[18] Frances Eastman, interview with the author (Ithaca, NY: October 30, 2008).

[19] Frances Eastman, interview with the author (Ithaca, NY: March 29, 2009); obituary for Frances Eastman, *Ithaca Journal* (February 11, 2010), www.legacy.com/obituaries/theithacajournal/obituary.aspx?n=frances-eastman&pid=139838308 (accessed June 30, 2014); Julius Eastman, application to Curtis Institute of Music for the program in composition, February 15, 1961 (Curtis Institute of Music Archives). I am grateful to Mary Jane Leach for sending me this and other documents from the Curtis Archives.

Figure 9.1 (*left to right*) Unidentified friend of the Eastman family, Julius, Frances, and Gerry Eastman.

he asked her to buy some music. She purchased a copy of *Für Elise*; he taught himself to read music and began studying piano.[20] His application to the composition program at the Curtis Institute lists Roger Hannah as his earliest teacher, in 1954–55, and states that he studied with Seymour Lipkin in New York in July and August 1958.[21] The Eastman family did not have much money—indeed, his mother recalled that finding even $5 for piano lessons was a hardship. She remained in Ithaca because she wanted her sons to have a backyard and because she wanted to keep them away from the drug trade in New York in the 1940s.[22]

Eastman displayed his talent in music at a young age, singing, playing piano, and composing. He was a strikingly precocious child. His mother recalled to me: "He was strange. From an early age, I tried to understand this child. I knew he was strange from very young. From two I knew he was smart. When I read to him at bedtime, he would say back, word for word, the story. That was strange."[23]

After enrolling at Ithaca College for one year, he auditioned at the Curtis Institute in piano and was admitted in 1959. Mieczysław Horszowski accepted him as a piano student. His application for the composition program lists these pieces as some of his "most important compositions studied": Bach, English Suites, nos. 2 and 3; Ravel, Sonatine; Bartók, Suite, op. 14; Debussy, *La cathédrale engloutie*, Beethoven, Sonatas, op. 2, no. 1, op. 2, no. 3, op. 10, no. 1, and op. 28.[24] Responding to the question on the application "What is your ultimate aim in studying music?" he wrote simply: "To obtain wisdom."[25]

In a letter to Jane Hill, the registrar, Eastman referred to his dismal living quarters as "barracks," writing, "[i]f I have to live there another year I shall die a morbid death."[26] However, he did not want to try to find another room, stating that "even worse than inevitably living in my cell is the fear and dread of having to call and knock at the door of strange people looking for a room."[27] Although he does not specify the reason for his "fear and dread," it is probable that Eastman, as a young black man, experienced

[20] Frances Eastman, interview with the author (Ithaca, NY: March 29, 2009).
[21] See Eastman, application to Curtis Institute of Music. Eastman was already a student in the piano program when he applied to Curtis for composition.
[22] Frances Eastman, interview with the author (Ithaca, NY: March 7, 2009).
[23] Frances Eastman, interview with the author (Ithaca, NY: March 29, 2009).
[24] Eastman, application to Curtis Institute of Music. [25] Ibid.
[26] Julius Eastman, letter to "Miss Hill," Curtis Institute of Music Archives, n.d. [27] Ibid.

difficulties securing a room in a private home in Philadelphia in the late 1950s and early 1960s.[28] After studying piano at Curtis for two years, he was accepted to the composition program. He studied counterpoint, harmony, and form and analysis with Constant Vauclain, and received a degree in composition from Curtis in 1963.

"A talented freak"

After completing his studies at Curtis, Eastman headed back north to Buffalo, where he joined a cutting-edge group of musicians and composers which included Morton Feldman, Lukas Foss, Petr Kotik, Jan Williams, David Del Tredici, Eberhard Blum, Benjamin Hudson, Pauline Oliveros, Paul Zukofsky, and many others who have become senior figures in American new music circles. At the invitation of Lukas Foss, in 1969 he joined the Creative Associates based at the University at Buffalo (see Figure 9.2) and was also a member of the S.E.M. Ensemble, newly founded by Kotik in 1970.[29] He was also in demand as a singer and pianist of common-practice repertory.[30]

Eastman's participation in the Creative Associates is perhaps surprising to those who have formed an image of American new music of the 1970s and 1980s as largely white, an image stoked by texts and concert programs that rarely include black contributions to new music. Eastman joined a number of African American musicians who were in residence at SUNY Buffalo in the late 1960s and early 1970s: Charles Mingus, who was a Visiting Slee Professor; Archie Shepp, appointed as the Associate Director of the Experimental Program for Independent Study; Charles Gayle, who was on the UB faculty and taught jazz; and vocalist Gwendolin Sims, who was also a Creative Associate.[31]

[28] Letter from "Secretary of Admissions" (unsigned) to "Mrs. Eastman," September 16, 1959, lists the addresses of four women who advertised rooms available with the YMCA, Curtis Institute of Music Archives.

[29] Archive of the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts, Music Library, University at Buffalo. Renée Levine Packer provides a history of the Creative Associates and the new music scene in Buffalo during these years in Levine Packer, *This Life of Sounds*.

[30] Eastman performed the role of Tonio in *Pagliacci* (Frances Eastman, interview with the author [Ithaca, NY: March 29, 2009]) and owned a copy of Brahms's *Vier ernste Gesänge*. My thanks to David Yearsley for sending me this score, which he found in an antique store in Ithaca.

[31] Archive of the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts, Music Library, University at Buffalo.

Figure 9.2 Morton Feldman seated at piano surrounded by Creative Associates (Julius Eastman, Jan Williams, William Appleby, David Del Tredici) (1972).

As a member of the Creative Associates, Eastman performed his own and others' music in Buffalo, New York City, and in Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, and the UK when the Creative Associates went on a European tour.[32] He experienced many professional struggles during this time. He gave up a job teaching music theory because he "couldn't adjust to the discipline of paperwork."[33] He was later appointed as an Assistant Professor at SUNY Buffalo, but his contract was terminated in 1975, in his fourth year of employment; his personnel file contains several complaints from students about his absences from classes and his disorganized style of teaching.[34] Explaining the change in his professional circumstances the following year to a reporter, he remarked that he "did not think that the Creative Associates were very creative any more. I had no power to

[32] A performance of Eastman's "Creation" for voice and ensemble from the S.E.M. Ensemble's Belgium tour was aired on the International Service of Belgium Radio and Television on August 26, 1973 and is available at https://archive.org/details/CM_1973_08_26 (accessed June 30, 2014). My thanks to Mary Jane Leach for sharing this link.

[33] Gann, "'Damned Outrageous'," 6.

[34] Personnel file of Julius Eastman, Archives, University at Buffalo.

plan programs and none of the stuff that I suggested was taken up. . . I was a kind of talented freak who occasionally injected some vitality into the programming."[35] After his faculty appointment at Buffalo was not renewed, Eastman decided to leave his post in 1975 rather than completing the additional year of teaching he was allowed. He began to focus his playing in jazz, sometimes with his younger brother Gerry Eastman, a gifted guitarist, bassist, composer, arranger, conductor, and bandleader, who performed with the Count Basie Orchestra and founded the Williamsburg Music Center in Brooklyn in 1981, "to foster the creation, performance, and appreciation of American classical music."[36]

In 1976, he moved to New York City and became affiliated with the Brooklyn Philharmonic, then under the direction of Lukas Foss; he joined other black composers in the Brooklyn Philharmonic Community Concert Series (co-directed by Eastman, Talib Hakim, and Tania León, with León as principal conductor), a series that aimed to diversify audiences for classical music.[37] During this period, his music was performed at the downtown venue The Kitchen, and he also collaborated with artist/cellist/singer Arthur Russell, recording "In the Light of the Miracle" and "Go Bang" with him.[38] In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Eastman toured as a vocalist with Meredith Monk and her ensemble, and recorded on her album *Dolmen Music*.[39]

In New York City, Eastman experienced severe financial problems and struggled with various drug and alcohol addictions.[40] Around 1980, he stopped paying rent and was evicted from his apartment at 6th Street and 2nd Avenue; after the sheriff moved his belongings, he lived in Tompkins Square Park in the East Village.[41] That event painfully recalls the devastating scene in Thomas Reichman's documentary *Mingus:*

[35] Strauss, "Julius Eastman": B-5.

[36] Williamsburg Music Center, http://wmcjazz.org/members/peter-north (accessed June 30, 2014).

[37] Tania León, pers. comm., November 18, 2005; Maurice Edwards, *How Music Grew in Brooklyn: A Biography of the Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 68, 123–24.

[38] For a discussion of Eastman's work with Arthur Russell, see Tim Lawrence, *Hold On to Your Dreams: Arthur Russell and the Downtown Music Scene, 1973–1992* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 155–57, 161–62. My thanks to Ryan Dohoney for sharing recordings and conversation about Eastman and Russell.

[39] For a discussion of Eastman's years in New York, see Ryan Dohoney, "Mapping Downtown: Julius Eastman's New York," in Levine Packer and Leach, eds. "Gay Guerrilla" (unpublished ms).

[40] Frances Eastman, interview with the author (Ithaca, NY: March 7, 2009); David Borden, interview with the author (Ithaca, NY: March 7, 2009).

[41] Leach, "In Search of Julius Eastman."

Charlie Mingus 1968, in which Mingus and his five-year-old daughter, Carolyn Mingus, are evicted from their loft in 1966 and his music goes flying out into the streets of New York.[42]

In the 1980s, Eastman's situation deteriorated swiftly. He lived in a homeless shelter in New York, and also lived in shelters for a time in Buffalo. In the early 1980s, Eastman was told that a job as a voice professor at Cornell would most likely materialize, but when that job fell through, he grew bitter about his career, which never took off, despite its immense promise.[43] His behavior became increasingly erratic. While using the practice rooms in the basement at Cornell, he sometimes let his cigarettes slowly burn out directly on the piano, to the alarm of faculty, who would check on him periodically.[44] He died in May 1990 at the age of forty-nine, alone in a hospital in Buffalo, with cardiac arrest listed as the official cause of death. Even many of his colleagues did not know that Eastman had died until Kyle Gann's obituary of him appeared in the *Village Voice* eight months later (see Figure 9.3).[45]

What happened?

It is worth pondering Eastman's poignant question, posed at the age of thirty, to a reporter who interviewed him—"I always thought I was great, but why does making it big take so long?"[46] When he moved to New York, he was active as a vocalist, pianist, and keyboardist, and worked with many downtown musicians.[47] In New York he became conductor of the CETA (Changing Education through the Arts) Orchestra.[48] Yet his own works were not frequently performed, and he did not have a publisher or a record contract. Reflecting on his career, he remarked: "I'm not a world figure, but certain people know me. I've never pushed my music at all. Maybe that's

[42] *Charles Mingus 1968*, dir. Thomas Reichman (Rhapsody Films, 1968).
[43] Borden, interview with the author (Ithaca, NY: March 7, 2009).
[44] Ibid.
[45] Kyle Gann, "That Which Is Fundamental: Julius Eastman, 1940–1990," *Village Voice* (January 22, 1991): 45, 79; reprinted in Kyle Gann, *Music Downtown: Writings from the* Village Voice (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 289–92.
[46] Suzanne Metzger, "I Always Thought I Was Great, But Why Does Making it Big Take So Long?," *The Reporter* (Buffalo, NY: September 30, 1971).
[47] Eastman performed on Meredith Monk's LP *Dolmen Music* (ECM Records 1197, 1981) and can be viewed performing with Monk in *4 American Composers*, vol. 3, dir. Peter Greenaway (Mystic Fire 76236, 1985).
[48] Lawrence, *Hold On to Your Dreams*, 155.

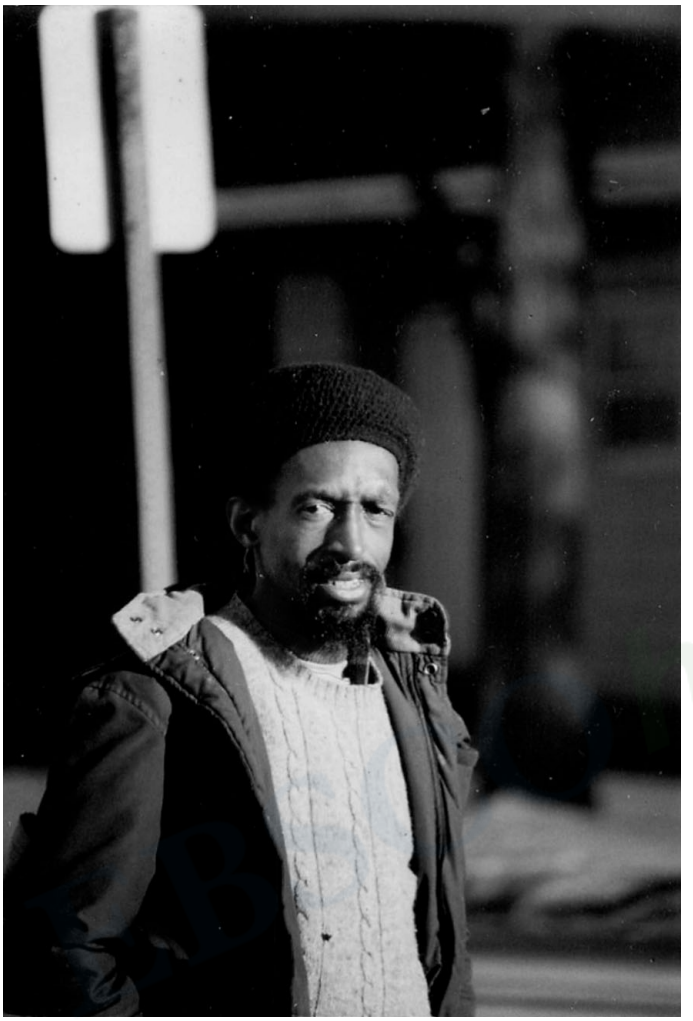

Figure 9.3 Julius Eastman (November 1989).

not a good quality particularly, but I've always figured that once one is known the publishers will come to you."[49]

The issue of why Eastman was not widely recognized during his lifetime, or in the years from his death in 1990 to around 2005, deserves discussion. Gerry Eastman is direct about the professional struggles and racism his brother experienced: "My brother. . .was an accomplished and well known composer and could not get his stuff played with his credentials, so I knew it would be hard to get on. I did not want to be out begging anyone to

[49] Metzger, "I Always Thought I Was Great."

compose music and play for."[50] He remarked further to Kyle Gann: "Racism within the classical world prevented him from doing the things he was doing. The system was rigged against him. It's the same old Scott Joplin/Charlie Parker story only with a different person. Julius is just another in the line of black geniuses who get squashed in this particular hemisphere."[51] Frances Eastman noted that he had not discussed racism with her as it impinged on his professional opportunities, adding that she thought he would not have wanted to upset her by telling her about such incidents. She expressed anger about his lack of professional recognition, attributing it in some situations to racism.[52] Eastman is mentioned briefly in Raoul Abdul, *Blacks in Classical Music* (1977), but is not included in any of the three editions of Eileen Southern's groundbreaking book *The Music of Black Americans* (1971, 1983, 1997); or in David N. Baker, Lida M. Belt, and Herman C. Hudson's edited volume *The Black Composer Speaks* (1978), James Haskins's *Black Music in America* (1987), or Samuel A. Floyd, Jr.'s *The Power of Black Music* (1995).[53] Further research is needed to explore more fully the reasons for Eastman's absence in volumes devoted to illuminating the neglected work of black musicians, despite his high profile during the 1970s as a performer in Aspen, New York, and Europe, and for his disappearance from the historical record more generally.

Evil Nigger

As a gay African American musician and composer working in the largely white new music scene of the 1970s and 1980s, Eastman did not readily fit into the worlds to which his musical talents brought him. His composition of what he dubbed the "Nigger Series" of works for multiple instrumentalists, which includes *Evil Nigger*, *Crazy Nigger*, *Dirty Nigger*, and *Nigger Faggot* (sometimes listed as NF) was shocking and

[50] J. Lisbon, "Gerry Eastman & The Williamsburg Music Center," *AMAG., Inc.* (May–June 2004): 26.
[51] Gann, *Music Downtown*, 291.
[52] Frances Eastman, interview with the author (Ithaca, NY: March 29, 2009).
[53] Raoul Abdul, *Blacks in Classical Music: A Personal History* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1977), 67–68; Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, 3rd edn (New York: W. W. Norton, [1971] 1997); David N. Baker, Lida M. Belt, and Herman C. Hudson, eds., *The Black Composer Speaks* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1978); James Haskins, *Black Music in America: A History Through Its People* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1987); and Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

offensive to audiences.[54] In the early 1980s, and still today, many do not wish to utter or circulate the titles of these works, given the painful histories of the slurs "nigger" and "faggot." A protest by Northwestern University students and a faculty member in the School of Music about the titles of the works on the upcoming concert prompted the following remarks by Eastman.[55]

> Now there was a little problem with the titles of the piece. There are some students and one faculty member who felt that the titles were somehow derogatory in some manner, being that the word "nigger" is in it. These particular titles—the reason I use them—is because. . .in fact I use. . .there's a whole series of these pieces. . .and they're called. . .they can be called a "Nigger Series." Now the reason I use that particular word is because, for me, it has a. . .is what I call a *basicness* about it. That is to say, I feel that, in any case, the first niggers were of course field niggers. And upon that is really the basis of what I call the American economic system. Without field niggers you wouldn't really have such a great and grand economy that we have. So that is what I call the first and great nigger, field niggers. And what I mean by niggers is that thing which is fundamental, that person or thing that attains to a basicness, a fundamentalness, and eschews that thing which is superficial or, or, what could we say—elegant. So a nigger for me is that kind of thing which is. . .attains himself or herself to the *ground* of anything, you see. And that's what I mean by nigger. There are many niggers, many kinds of niggers.[56]

Eastman's lecture is a form of Signifyin(g), the linguistic practice theorized by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in which African Americans' utterances are posited to be a form of double-voiced discourse that *seem* to respond at face value to a remark, situation, or cultural moment, but that actually comment critically, ironically, and playfully using "a mode of linguistic circumnavigation. . .[using] a second language that they can share with other black people."[57]

[54] Eastman premiered *NF* at the opening of the 1978–79 Community Concerts series in a program dedicated to the memory of Langston Hughes, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Brooklyn. See Edwards, *How Music Grew in Brooklyn*, 111.

[55] Hanson-Dvoracek identifies For Members Only (FMO), a black student alliance at Northwestern University, as the organization that protested the upcoming concert and arranged a meeting with Eastman and Northwestern faculty composer Peter Gena. At the meeting, both sides agreed that the titles would be removed from the posters and program, and that Eastman would have the opportunity to address the titles at the performance. Hanson-Dvoracek, "Julius Eastman's 1980 Residency," 31.

[56] Julius Eastman, introduction to the Northwestern University concert, January 16, 1980, transcribed from Eastman, *Unjust Malaise*.

[57] Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 76. The inflections and cadences of Eastman's spoken remarks on the recording reinforce this reading. My thanks to Kevin C. Holt for sharing his

Eastman's explanation did not help his case with the largely white audience at Northwestern; a dry jab at the American economic system is mixed in with a nod to African American workers who were not of the "House" variety.[58] In an interview with the *Northwestern Daily*, Eastman declared, "I admire the name 'nigger.' It's a strong name. I feel that it's a name that has a historical importance and even protects blacks. [It is] the most real part of whatever you're into. You can't wear Gucci shoes and be a nigger."[59] His tongue-in-cheek, quasi-learned lecture about the term is a performance in itself, one that keeps the audience's hackles raised and refuses to back down, with no apology or even acknowledgment of its offensiveness.[60]

Eastman's music generally comprises a kind of "ecstatic minimalism" that immediately demands our attention, one consonant with Rothko's remark to Motherwell: "Ecstasy alone was it; art is ecstatic or it's nothing."[61] The recorded performance at Northwestern University features four pianists, of whom he is one. As Eastman notes, the instrumentation of these works could vary in performance; he recommends ten to eighteen strings as an alternative scoring.[62]

Evil Nigger (1979) immediately establishes the quickly tossed off F-E-D motive that hammers on the D; the opening is shown in Figure 9.4.[63] The music is far from static, introducing the motive in deeper and deeper registers; the eight-note phrase D-A-B-flat-F-G-A-D notated in the bass

stimulating ideas on Signifyin(g) and its relevance to Missy Elliott's "Work It," in his seminar blog post, New Currents in Hip Hop Studies, Columbia University, January 2014.

58 According to the *Daily Northwestern*, the audience was "mostly white" and numbered about 110 people. See Hanson-Dvoracek, "Julius Eastman's 1980 Residency," 33.

59 Jeff Bloch, "Black Musician's Song Titles Censored by FMO Protest," *Daily Northwestern* (January 17, 1980); cited in Hanson-Dvoracek, "Julius Eastman's 1980 Residency," 80. Elsewhere in his study, Hanson-Dvoracek attributes the quote to the *Evanston Review* (January 10, 1980): 32.

60 The recording of Eastman's lecture clearly indicates the discomfort of audience members, making audible coughing and restless movement. Hanson-Dvoracek discusses the politics of Eastman's titles and their relation to the pieces in "Julius Eastman's 1980 Residency," 74–84.

61 James E. B. Breslin, *Mark Rothko: A Biography* (University of Chicago Press, 1993), 333.

62 Eastman, introduction to the Northwestern University concert.

63 The score is available at www.mjleach.com/EastmanScores.htm (accessed June 30, 2014). Hanson-Dvoracek also analyzes *Evil Nigger*, *Gay Guerrilla*, and *Crazy Nigger* in "Julius Eastman's 1980 Residency," 37–74. Analytical approaches to minimalism and post-minimalism appear in Jonathan Bernard, "Theory, Analysis, and the 'Problem' of Minimal Music," in Elizabeth West Marvin and Richard Hermann, eds., *Concert Music, Rock, and Jazz Since 1945: Essays and Analytical Studies* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1995), 259–84; Tristian Evans, "Analysing Minimalist and Postminimalist Music," in Keith Potter, Kyle Gann, and Pwyll ap Siôn, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013); and Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*.

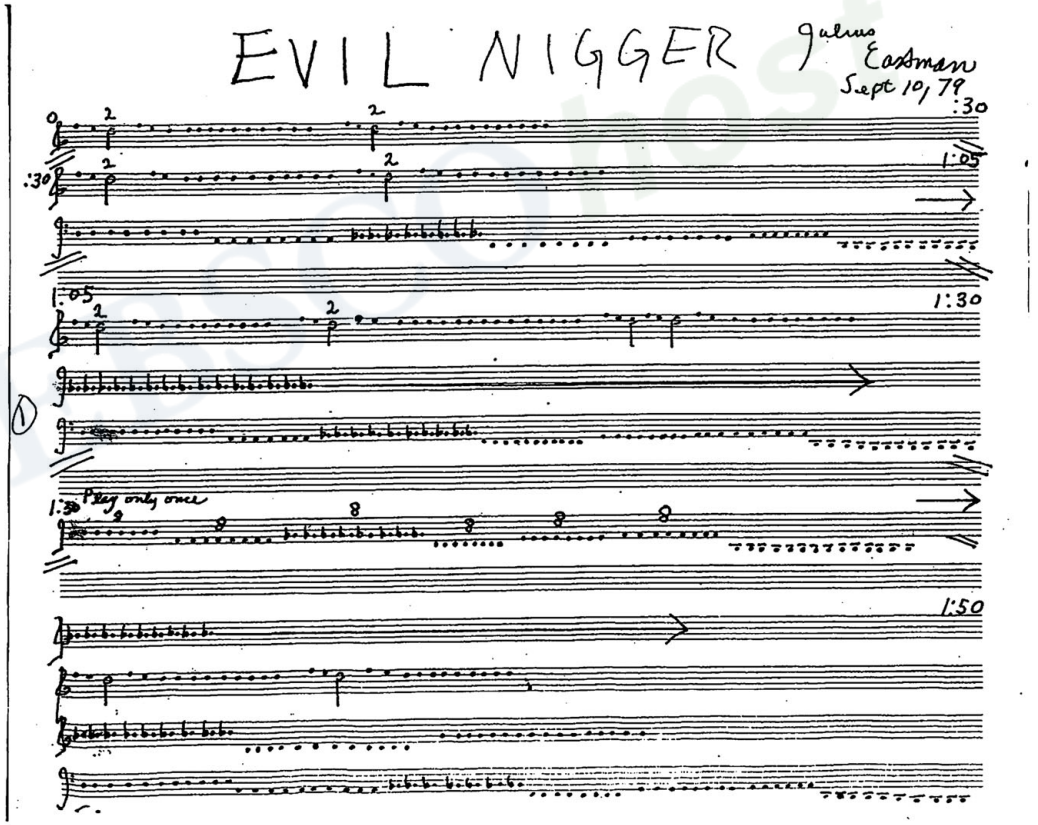

Figure 9.4 Julius Eastman, *Evil Nigger*, 0:00–1:50

clef, between 0:30 and 1:05, and twice again on the page, functions as a ground bass in the piece—evoking Eastman's "ground of anything" in which the bass is reconceived as a post-minimalist device—and confounds that minor thirdness of the F-E-D that might threaten to become tedious if heard for too long a time.

As this piece demonstrates, Eastman's music demands much of the performer, without dictating a single result. The pianists know to move to the next section through the timings, indicated on cards held aloft in performance by a timekeeper, but the register is not fixed, and nor is the coordination among the performers.[64] The repeated hammering of a single note for many minutes at a stretch is itself physically demanding, and the melodic lines are sometimes in canon, coming together at the eight-note ground bass played in unison. The four pianists must work fiercely to coordinate, although Eastman's own involvement in the performances of his music undoubtedly assisted in its realization.

The "basicness," or "that thing which is fundamental" to which Eastman alludes in his remarks preceding the Northwestern concert, can be heard in the piece's loud, in-your-face title, which he translates into an insistent, single-minded proffering. This core set of sonic ideas functions as a musical magnet to which the musicians always return after his verbal directive "1–2–3–4" heard on the recording, and the musicians' need to align with each other at regular temporal markers further underscores the basicness of the formal organization: each performer must explore the limited range of musical resources provided, moving further afield as the piece unfolds, and then converge at the specified time points. The last section of the piece offers a breaking apart of the three-note motive and the "D-ness" that dominates the work into less pitch-centric shards and moves to a quiet, meditative close that tempers the outrageous aspect of the work.

Crazy Nigger

The Crazy version of Eastman's series, *Crazy Nigger* (*c.* 1980), begins with a repeated, jittery B-flat—a cousin of *Evil*'s D-natural—and illustrates what Eastman termed "organic music":

> These particular pieces. . .formally are an attempt to what I call make "organic" music. That is to say, the third part of any part (of the third measure or the third section, the third part) has to contain all of the information of the first two parts

[64] Hanson-Dvoracek, "Julius Eastman's 1980 Residency," 29–30.

and then go on from there. So therefore, unlike Romantic music or Classical music where you have actually different sections and you have these sections which for instance are in great contrast to the first section or to some other section in the piece. . .these pieces they're not. . .they're not exactly perfect yet. They're not perfect. But there's an attempt to make every section contain all of the information of the previous section, or else taking out information at a gradual and logical rate.[65]

The "additive process" shown here is at work in Philip Glass's *1 + 1* of 1968 and other of his compositions.[66] As shown in Figure 9.5, Eastman introduces a new section of the piece, or region, every ninety seconds in the opening. A-flat enters at 1:30, creeps up to A-natural, and then returns to the nervous B-flat-magnet. At 3:00, a third line enters, C-B-flat; this two-note motive becomes a central idea in the piece.[67]

Eastman's ability to keep the musical material fresh when there is so little of it in a fifty-five-minute piece underscores the work demanded of each performer: not merely providing textural "filler," each instrument is a cog in a communal effort to build a common edifice, or system, through simple pitch material and labor-intensive means, avoiding ornament of any kind. The passage starting at 37:00 shows how the last third of the piece employs Eastman's organic form. Figure 9.6 illustrates the pitch structure.

The texture is stripped down to a bare F-natural, which then proceeds to F and F-sharp, then F, F-sharp, A, then F, F-sharp, A, B, then F, F-sharp, A, B, B-flat, now every fifteen seconds. The G that would fill out the F to B-natural gap is withheld until it is approached a second time: B, then B and A, then B, A, F-sharp, then B, A, F-sharp, B-flat, A-flat, then finally B, A, F-flat, B-flat, A-flat, G. Having filled in the hexachord from F-flat to B-natural, the piece, at three-quarters of the way through, begins on A at 44:00, then adds G, then F-sharp, then E, then E-flat, then B-flat, then C, ending on C-sharp at 46:00, as shown in Example 9.6. This addition creates a glorious jangling and shaking of these notes from the four pianos, in what sounds like free pitch choice, but is actually carefully circumscribed. Thus what may *seem* to be musical expression largely dependent on the improvisatory skills of the performers for its success

[65] Eastman, introduction to the Northwestern University concert.

[66] Though Eastman and Glass must have crossed paths at some point in New York, I do not know whether Eastman would have acknowledged Glass as an influence.

[67] Eastman prepared a "logical schemata" to be distributed at the door to an audience of this work at The Kitchen on February 8–9, 1980. It is available at www.mjleach.com/Eastman%20Scores/Eastman_CN_Schemat.pdf (accessed June 30, 2014).

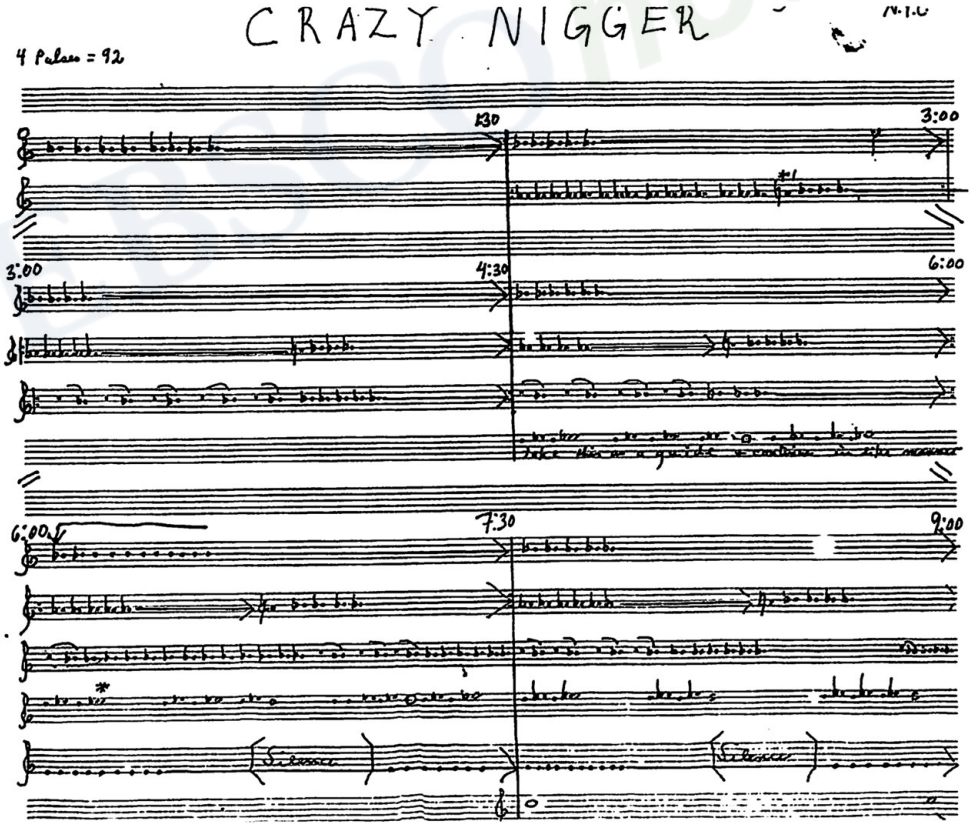

Figure 9.5 Eastman, *Crazy* Nigger, 0:00–9:00

37:00 F
37:15 F, F-sharp
37:30 F, F-sharp, A
37:45 F, F-sharp, A, B
38:00 F, F#, A, B, B-flat
38:15 B
38:30 B, A
38:45 B, A, F-sharp
39:00 B, A, F-sharp, B-flat
39:15 B, A, F-sharp, B-flat, A-flat
39:30 B, A, F-sharp, B-flat, A-flat, G
39:45 G

"melt to B, A, F-sharp, B-flat, A-flat, G"

41:45 F
42:45 F, E
43:00 F, E, D
43:15 F, E, D, C
43:30 F, E, D, C, B-flat
43:45 F, E-flat, D, C, B-flat [E-flat substitutes for E]
44:00 A
44:15 A
44:30 A, G
44:45 A, G, F-sharp
45:00 A, G, F-sharp, E
45:15 A, G, F-sharp, E, E-flat
45:30 A, G, F-sharp, E, E-flat, B-flat
45:45 A, G, F-sharp, E, E-flat, B-flat, C
46:00 C-sharp

Figure 9.6 Pitch structure in *Crazy Nigger*, 37:00–46:00

unfolds "at a gradual and logical rate"; what may seem to be "crazy" in the sense of erratic or patchwork in fact emerges from a carefully constructed precompositional system.

Gay Guerrilla

Eastman was, according to Kyle Gann, "[n]ever shy about his gayness."[68] In a 1976 interview published in the *Buffalo Evening News*, Eastman declared: "What I am trying to achieve is to be what I am to the fullest—Black to the fullest, a musician to the fullest, a homosexual to the fullest. It is important that I learn how to be, by that I mean accept everything about me."[69] Julius's father once asked Frances Eastman if she noticed anything "different" about their older son; she recalled that he was unaccepting of Julius's presumed sexual identity. In my interviews with her,

[68] Gann, "'Damned Outrageous'," 4. [69] Strauss, "Julius Eastman": B-5.

I found her to be very accepting of her son's homosexuality, and that she was disturbed by her husband's discomfort with their son.[70]

Before the Northwestern University concert, Eastman spoke about another work, written a few years after these comments, with another attention-grabbing title:

> Now the reason I use *Gay Guerrilla*, G-U-E-R-R-I-L-L-A, that one, is because uh. . .these names. . .let me put a little subsystem here. These names, either I glorify them or they glorify me. And in the case of guerrilla, that glorifies gay. That is to say I don't. . .there aren't many gay guerrillas. I don't feel that. . .Gaydom. . .does have that strength. So therefore I use that word in hopes that they *will*. You see. . .I feel I don't. . . At this point I don't feel that gay guerrillas can really match with Afghani guerrillas or PLO guerrillas. But let us hope that at some point in the future they might. You see, that's why I use that word guerrilla. It means. . . A guerilla is someone who in any case is sacrificing his life for a point of view. And you know if there is a cause, and if it is a great cause, those who belong to that cause, will sacrifice their blood because without blood there is no cause. So therefore that is the reason that I use "gay guerrilla," in hopes that I might be one if called upon to be one.[71]

Eastman firmly sticks to his guns about the title, and the applause that usually concludes a composer's pre-concert remarks is palpably absent from the audience—all we hear are his footsteps as he walks to the piano.

The delicate, plain, and tender opening of *Gay Guerrilla* (*c.* 1980), shown in Figure 9.7, with a simple, repeated A-natural, establishes a quiet mood, one that accumulates more baggage along the way. It reaches up and down for higher and lower As, then grasps a D to produce the perfect fourth and fifth, then an F sounds, and then a B-A motive completes the seventh chord. (Eastman is certainly thinking triadically, and notes minor-seventh chords built on A, E, F-sharp, G-sharp, and C-sharp in the manuscript.) The rhythmic motive of a quarter note and two eighth notes persists throughout the thirty-minute work, and the melodic changes—with half and whole steps, fifths, and the occasional tritone—suggest that more is afoot than the beautiful and simple aesthetic of the opening.

The first black note, F-sharp, does not appear until six and a half minutes into the piece. About halfway through the piece, at 14:20, the pianos move to B-sharp-C-sharp-E-sharp-G-sharp, and then at 15:00,

[70] Frances Eastman, interviews with the author (Ithaca, NY: October 30, 2008 and March 29, 2009).

[71] Eastman, introduction to the Northwestern University concert.

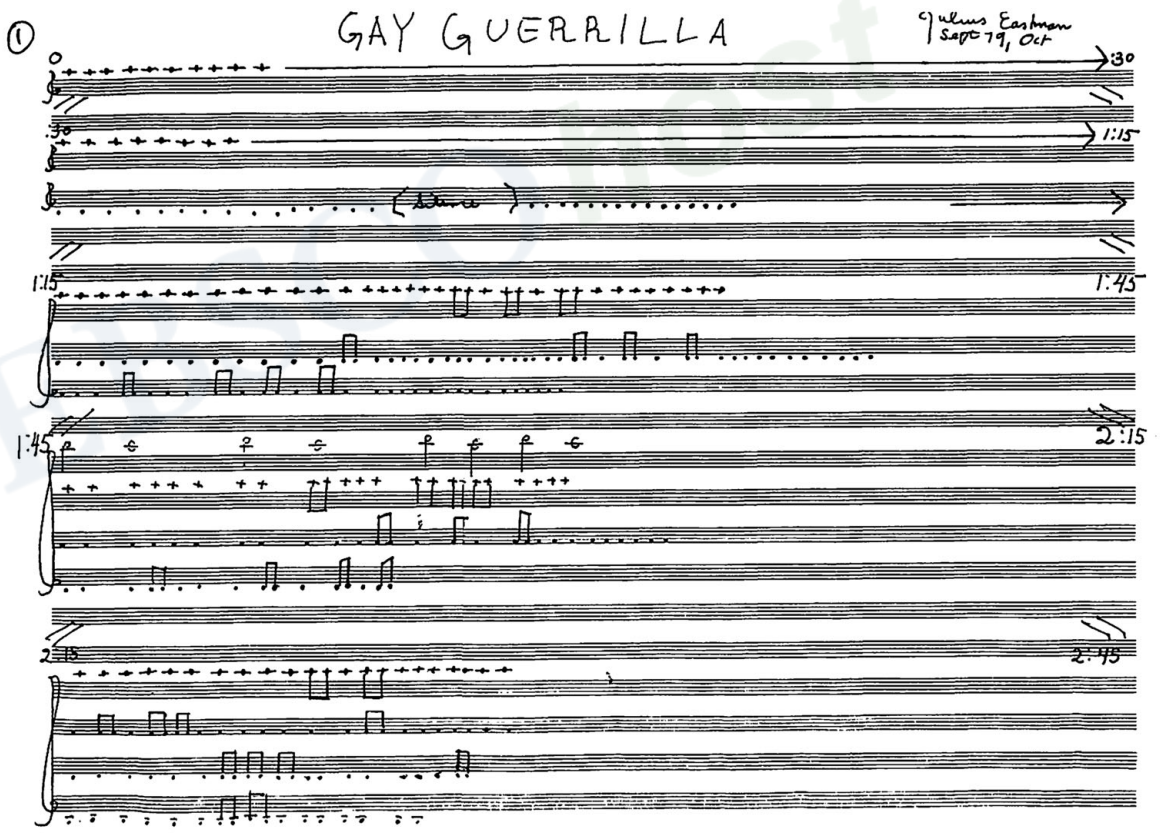

Figure 9.7 Eastman, *Gay Guerrilla*, 0:00–2:45

to D-sharp-C-sharp-G-sharp, thus having modulated from all-white keys to all-black keys.[72]

In *Gay Guerrilla*, the almost defiant inclusion of the Lutheran chorale *A Mighty Fortress is Our God* (near 18:30) suggests a religious strain in the piece.[73] The chorale melody appears in a seemingly unwelcoming climate, with the surrounding rhythmic motive of a quarter note-two eighth notes now sounding harsh and agitated, rather than gentle, as shown in Figure 9.8.

A compositional link to *Gay Guerrilla* is the second movement of Debussy's *En blanc et noir*, a work for two pianos that Eastman might have known as a conservatory-trained pianist.[74] Both *En blanc et noir* and *Gay Guerrilla* incorporate a quotation from *A Mighty Fortress* that is placed squarely within a brutal and militaristic musical context. In *En blanc et noir*, the quote appears in mm. 73–88, and, as in *Gay Guerrilla*, it enters bravely, played *lourd* by piano 1's right hand with a *poco marcato* sixteenth-note figure played by the left hand, over alternating eighth notes in piano 2. That Eastman's piece is also "in white and black," traversing white and black keys, is yet another compositional nod to Debussy.

The musical logic of the piece, including the use of quotation, white-and-black keys, title, and connection to Debussy's earlier composition, suggests that the determined restatements of *A Mighty Fortress* against the rhythmic motives are fierce and impossible to ignore, with the material eventually being passed to more voices than one. Perhaps the presence of this quote from a Lutheran hymn in a piece marked by its composer with the adjective "gay" invokes "our helper He" to assist those who are called upon to be "gay guerrillas." In Eastman's words:

[72] The use of this fundamental division of the keyboard in some twentieth-century repertoire has prompted studies that examine the interplay between black and white keys. David Lewin explores contrasts between black notes and white notes in his analysis of Debussy's "Feux d'artifice," in David Lewin, *Musical Form and Transformation: 4 Analytic Essays* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 97–159. I explore the relationship between black keys and white keys in my gender-/sexuality-based analysis of Marion Bauer's Toccata, in *Gendering Musical Modernism*, 99–121.

[73] According to his mother, Julius was deeply interested in religion and spirituality, which is reflected in compositions such as *The Holy Presence of Joan d'Arc* (1981) for voice and ten cellos; *Buddha* (1984); *Our Father* (1989) for two male voices; and *Gay Guerrilla*. Frances Eastman, interview with the author (Ithaca, NY: March 7, 2009). Scores of Eastman's *The Holy Presence of Joan d'Arc*, *Buddha*, *Our Father*, and *Gay Guerrilla* are available at www.mjleach.com/EastmanScores.htm (accessed June 30, 2014).

[74] A score is available at http://conquest.imslp.info/files/imglnks/usimg/8/8e/IMSLP02726-Debussy_en-blanc-et-noir_2.pdf (accessed June 30, 2014).

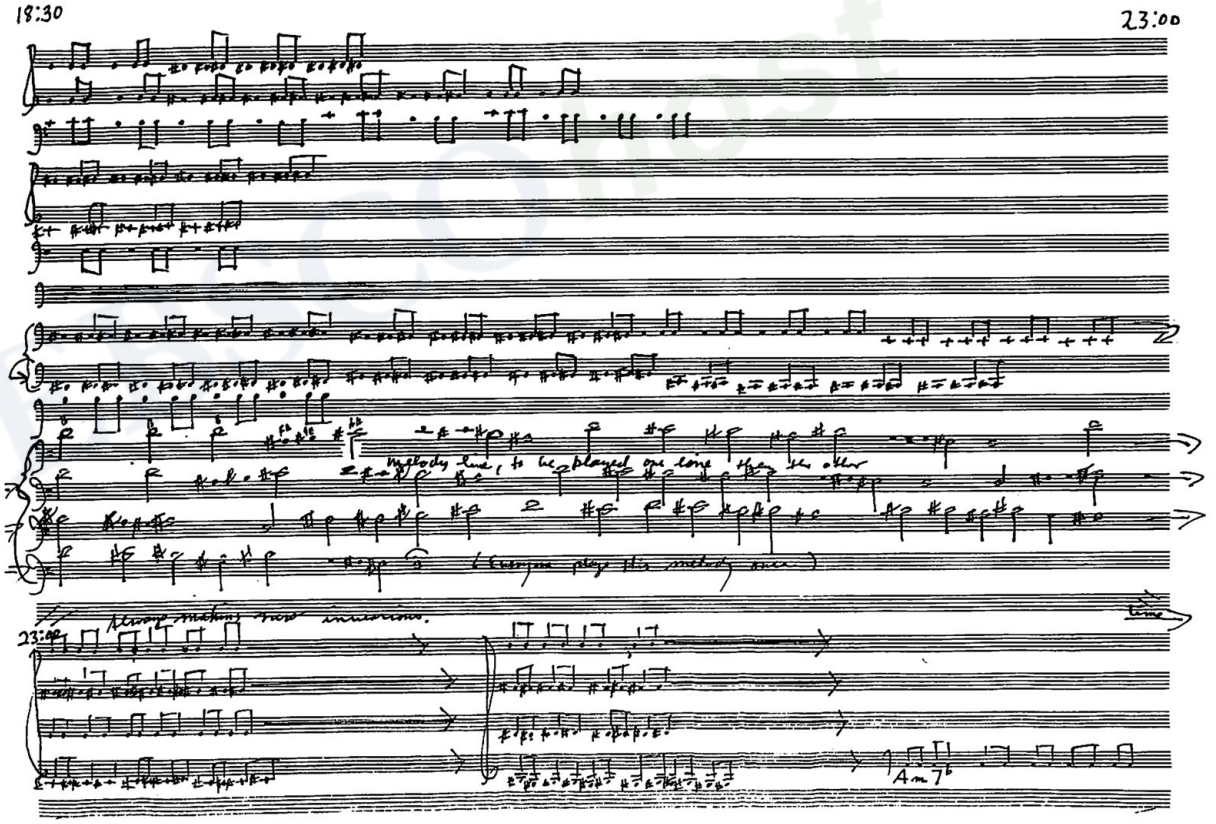

Figure 9.8 Eastman, *Gay Guerrilla*, 18:30–23:00

What amazes me is how few artists of all people are willing to admit their homosexuality. I have discovered that most are uptight on that subject, afraid to reveal themselves, and afraid to admit to the world who they are. People fear punishment. There is always somebody who is trying to crush you. I refuse to think about that. I refuse to be afraid of my own comrades, of being castigated, thrown out or thought of badly.[75]

This "refusal to be afraid" is palpable in *Gay Guerrilla*. The final moments of the work constitute no mere return to the beauty of the beginning, but seem less tentative and more confident, having traversed a difficult path without firm tonal footing for quite a while, and end peacefully in the piano's highest register.

Hearing difference

The dynamic of confrontation, as heard in the bold entrance of *A Mighty Fortress* in inhospitable surroundings, and embrace of fearlessness was by no means limited to the internal workings of Eastman's music. Ned Sublette remarks that "Julius was such a tremendous font of energy. He was such a thoroughly musical person, and we all liked his edge."[76] This "edge" is prominently displayed in Eastman's performance of John Cage's *Song Books* at the June in Buffalo festival in 1975. He responded to the instruction "Give a lecture" by giving a lecture as "Professor Padu" about a "new system of love," with a nude man and a partially nude woman on stage, a performance that greatly angered Cage.[77]

In her essay "Big Ears," Sherrie Tucker advocates ear-training—not by using traditional solfège, but by "hearing and analyzing jazz activity and meaning more historically and more in tune with its musical and

[75] Strauss, "Julius Eastman": B-5. [76] Lawrence, *Hold On to Your Dreams*, 155.

[77] A recording of the performance is housed at the Music Library, University at Buffalo, and a transcript by Adam Overton in collaboration with G. Douglas Barrett of Eastman's performance, with additional accounts from audience members about the staging and audience response, is available at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yyp5VuDsnZOdo2v8ZfV9qEL261Jc2QaCYIMtRDMrVpM/edit?pli=1 (accessed June 30, 2014). Steven Schlegel discusses this performance in "John Cage at June in Buffalo, 1975," MA thesis, University at Buffalo, 2008. Ryan Dohoney explores this performance and Cage's response to it in relation to camp and Eastman's gay aesthetic in Dohoney, "John Cage, Julius Eastman, and the Homosexual Ego."

social complexity."[78] Tucker's call for scholarship in jazz to attend to gender analysis, and the theoretical space her work opens, resonates strongly with this essay's aim of hearing notes as products of music's histories and human subjects, a stance still unusual in music theory's continued privileging of the printed score and disciplinary divergence from musicology.[79] Acknowledging the expressive freedoms woven into the fabric of Eastman's compositions makes possible new habits of listening. The emancipatory potential of Eastman's music in its posthumous rebirth is just now beginning to be realized, but it is audible in two recent works: Jace Clayton's CD *The Julius Eastman Memory Depot* and Amy Knoles's arrangement and performance titled *Julius Eastman FOUND*. Clayton's brilliant 2013 recording contains arrangements of *Gay Guerrilla* and *Evil Nigger* performed by pianists David Friend and Emily Manzo which he altered using real-time electronic processing.[80] Clayton reads Eastman's work as "bringing in ideas of class and of race and of sex and it's all there in what is traditionally this sort of. . .white-cube blank-space of classical music."[81] Percussionist and composer Amy Knoles's *Julius Eastman FOUND*, a direct response to *Unjust Malaise*, is a solo live electronic percussion arrangement of Eastman's works and was performed with Butoh choreographer and dancer Michael Sakamoto at the world premiere at Goddard College in 2013, as well as in Slovakia and the Czech Republic.[82] By hearing Eastman's

[78] Sherrie Tucker, "Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies," *Current Musicology* 71–73 (Spring 2001–Spring 2002): 377.

[79] The author's 1994 review of *Musicology and Difference* noted the reluctance of the "new musicology" to reach across to its sibling discipline of music theory, a situation that has changed considerably during the past twenty years. See Ellie M. Hisama, "Review of *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie; *Gender and the Musical Canon*, by Marcia J. Citron," *Journal of Musicology* 12:2 (Spring 1994): 227. Palpable in 2014 is music theory's continued disciplinary reluctance to engage at length with gender-, sexuality-, and race-based studies in musicology or ethnomusicology, and as a result it has arguably become a more strongly stand-alone field than it was in the 1990s.

[80] Jace Clayton, *The Julius Eastman Memory Depot* (New Amsterdam NWAM045, 2013).

[81] Scott Simon, "Jace Clayton Revives a Forgotten Voice from New York's Vanguard," NPR Music (March 29, 2013), www.npr.org/2013/03/30/175725860/jace-claton-revives-a-forgotten-voice-from-new-yorks-vanguard (accessed June 30, 2014).

[82] "'Crazy Nigger': Amy Knoles Plays Julius Eastman," www.goddard.edu/news-events/events/crazy-nigger-amy-knoles-plays-julius-eastman (accessed June 30, 2014); http://amyknoles.org/performances.html (accessed June 30, 2014). Knoles writes: "Hearing [*Unjust Malaise*] made me want to also champion his music," www.vimeo.com/electronicpercussionist (accessed June 30, 2014).

music as intertwined with his life and against the larger backdrop of American music of the 1970s and 1980s, we contemplate some of the diverse ways that the politics of race, gender, and sexuality have informed new music composition, stepping into the zone of difference that Eastman experienced, embraced, and forced his listeners to confront.