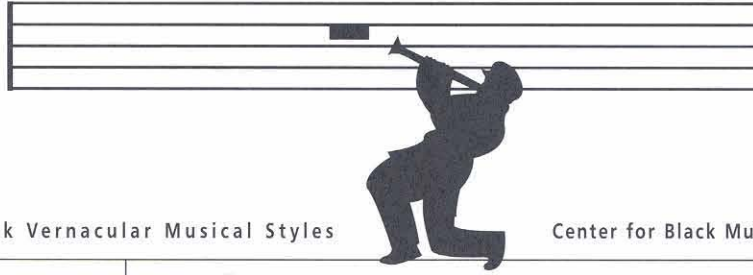


STOP-TIME!



Spring 1999 Tracing U.S. Black Vernacular Musical Styles

Center for Black Music Research, Columbia College Chicago

BY GUTHRIE RAMSEY JR.

Project Stop-Time is a celebration. Although the primary impulse behind the latest project for the Center for Black Music Research is, of course, educational, it's a celebration and a party nonetheless. I characterize the project in this way for many reasons.

Ensemble Stop-Time jams! This collective of sixteen musicians embraces a variety of performing media, including solo, duo, quintet, septet, and big band jazz instrumentations. Comprised of some of Chicago's leading professional musicians, the ensemble performs the entire range of African-American popular music, from spirituals, blues, and ragtime, to gospel, R&B, and hip hop. The ensemble teaches about the history of black vernacular music in the United States through public performances and lecture-demonstrations.

The ensemble was obviously hand picked, and as a native Chicagoan, I came of age hearing about and listening to the exploits of many of these musicians. Mwata Bowden, Ari Brown, Ken Chaney, and Art Hoyle are just a few from this who's who list—they are "the cats"—musicians parlance for elite practitioners of black vernacular music. What a pleasure it was for me to witness them playing together live at the Stop-Time Ensemble's first performance.

While education may be the key to Stop-Time, pleasure opens the door to

The Celebration Impulse and Project Stop-Time

While education may be the key to Stop-Time, pleasure opens the door to understanding.



Ensemble Stop-Time clarinetist, Aaron Horne and trombonist, Stephen Berry Photo: Dan Rest

understanding. An air of celebration filled the space despite the first concert's more or less formal surroundings in the spectacular Robeson Theater of Chicago's South Shore Cultural Center. The Cultural Center is located on Chicago's Southside, in the historic Black Belt, which has provided a fertile atmosphere for jazz, gospel, blues, R&B, soul, hip-hop, and spoken-word musicians throughout the twentieth

century. Bronzeville, as this neighborhood is called, provided the people, institutions, and performance venues with one of America's most influential cultural explosions. While no one city can claim exclusive bragging rights to any particular genre of black vernacular music, one can still identify specific locales such as Chicago's South and West sides as singularly important to the development (*continued on page 2*)

