

# **Don't deny my name: The resounding of a Black avant-garde in post-war music history**

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## **Abstract**

From a vantage point surveying the past half-century's radical and often utopian experimentation, the free improvisational practices of the jazz avant-garde stand as perhaps one of the most significant, yet too often overlooked, expressions of iconoclastic musical innovation in the post-war era. Based on over a decade of ethnographic fieldwork with a contemporary community of improvising musicians in New York City, I argue that high-handed dismissals from institutionally validated "serious-music" vanguardists—along with rear-guard denunciations from jazz neo-conservatives of what they term the "so-called avant-garde"—reveal in their attempts at effacement and exclusion a profound anxiety, engendered by the survival of a movement that has challenged fundamental premises of the racially marked jazz and concert-music worlds. In exploring the discourses surrounding, if not always successfully containing, this black avant-garde, I thus engage what Fred Moten has identified as the defining paradox of such movements: the manner in which they appear to exist "oxymoronically—as if black, on the one hand, and avant-garde, on the other hand, each depends for its coherence upon the exclusion of the other." Through an analysis of the aporias from which this conundrum arises, I ultimately find that the unique vantage point jazz provides upon the avant-garde not only makes possible a critical reappraisal of established theories of the phenomenon—such as those of Poggioli, Bürger, and Enzensberger—but also helps cast light upon the intersection between cultural identity and racial ideology in Euro-American post/modernism.

## **CV**

Scott Currie earned his bachelor's degree in African American Music at the State University of New York College at Old Westbury, and his master's and doctoral degrees in Ethnomusicology at New York University. His research to date has focused on ethnographic studies of avant-garde jazz practice in New York City and Berlin. He has received grants from the German Marshall Fund, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), and New York University, and has published articles and reviews in the *Glendora Review* and *Ethnomusicology*. Before joining the faculty of the University of Minnesota, he taught at the Eastman School of Music, the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign), and New York University. In addition, he has served as associate director of the Vision Festival, an independent avant-garde arts festival in New York, and founded the Sound Vision Orchestra, in which he currently serves as saxophonist and president.