

9/1/63

Thousands of
Negroes

CORE, NAACP, SCLC, SNCC, ~~Negroes~~ Randolph, Urban League
Whitney Young - National Urban League
Dr. Martin Luther King - Christian Leadership Conference Southern
A. Philip Randolph
Roy Wilkins - NAACP
James Farmer/Floyd McKissick - CORE
John Lewis - Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee

Dear So and So:

The March on Washington was an inspired and an inspiring event, and I was proud to have taken part in it. Please understand, in the light of what I am going to say in the rest of this letter, that my respect and admiration for those who conceived of and carried out the **March** is very great, and that I realize that the demands on their time and attention **must** be overwhelming.

I am a Negro jazz musician, and
/I am sorry to have to write this letter at all. In addition to those you will receive that praise the March in unqualified terms you will probably receive others that say, "The March was great, but..." This is one of those letters, and I can only ask that you read it and try to understand the feeling with which it is written.

recently
Two things have happened/^{recently} that make this letter necessary, although there are many other things that could be cited. The first concerns the March. What did the entertainment--or, should I say the musical and spoken testimonials from the entertainment world--consist of? Folk music, a sprinkling of gospel music, Hollywood personalities, pop vocalists, a couple of classical vocalists. What was missing? ~~Jazz~~ Jazz was missing. It was totally and completely absent. Why?

The other example, while not attributable to the March leaders, does, nevertheless, I am sure, reflect the attitudes of the Negro leadership and the Negro middle class. It is the Emancipation Centennial edition of Ebony, in which jazz was also omitted completely. Every conceivable area of Negro contribution to American culture and to the struggle for equal rights was mentioned except music--Negro music. It wasn't even included in the usual step-child fashion as a part of the article on Negro entertainment. Why?

Negro jazz musicians are in the ironic position of seeming, as a group, to bear

"Leaders" Letter

- Whitney Young - Urban League
- Martin Luther King - Southern Christian Leadership Conference
- A. Philip Randolph - Negro Labor Council
- Roy Wilkins - NAACP
- James Farmer/Floyd McKissick - CORE
- John Lewis - Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee

- ~~Dave~~ Hepburn - Amsterdam News
- Allan Morrison - Ebony
- John Davis - AMSAC

James Baldwin - ????

Others:??

Kenneth D. Clark

Malcolm X

Bugue Rustin

The March on Washington was an inspired an an inspiring event, and I was proud to have taken part in it. Please understand, in the light of what I am going to say in this letter, that my respect and admiration for those who conceived of and carried out the March is very great, and that I realize the demands on your time and attention must be overwhelming.

As a Negro jazz composer and pianist who has been involved in the civil rights struggle for a long time, one of the reasons I attended the March was to incorporate the mood and feeling ~~intensity~~ of this unique event into my music, and I do hope to commemorate the March musically. For, of course, not only I but many jazz composers and musicians are exceptionally sensitive to the social upheaval taking place and are ~~now~~ explicitly expressing the Negro's fight for freedom in our music. /Should we mention Max, Mingus and others here, and if so, exactly how?? / So perhaps you can imagine my hurt and humiliation when I realized that there was no jazz at all used at this historic occasion. ~~Output box~~ I don't mean to disparage ~~them~~ music that was presented, but surely, in this most important of all civil rights demonstrations, jazz could have been included. Although it may not have lyrics, jazz by its very nature is the music of freedom.

The total lack of jazz at the March is only the most glaring example of a long-standing practice on the part of the Negro leadership: ignoring jazz' contribution to and enrichment of Negro cultural life. In fact, it seems that Negro jazz musicians, as a group, are in the ironic position of bearing the same relationship to the Negro leadership as the Negro people as a whole bear to the white majority in this country.

That doesn't mean the leaders in the civil rights ~~fight~~ don't use jazz, for eva-
 dently someone has discovered that jazz is helpful in raising money for this cause. I and many of my colleagues--for I'm speaking for them as well as myself--have given our time and talents, always without pay, for countless civil rights benefits, and gladly. We have played for benefits in behalf of NAACP, CORE, the Negro Labor Council, the Southern Leadership Conference, etc., in theaters, churches, concert halls, night clubs, private homes, etc. And yet rarely have these same groups ever used jazz in any other capacity, nor have they included jazz in their "respectable," prestige affairs.

get the Negro leadership to recognize us
 What do we as jazz artists have to do to/~~be recognized~~ as the creators of a true art form? There is no finer example than jazz of the Negro's contribution to the