

BRAITHWAITE & KATZ

Communications

NEWS RELEASE

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Trumpeter/Composer Wadada Leo Smith Presents World Premiere of Civil Rights Opus “Ten Freedom Summers” with Golden Quartet and Southwest Chamber Music

Multi-Media Event October 28 – 30 at the
REDCAT Theater in the Walt Disney Concert Hall Complex, Los Angeles

Pre-concert discussion to include Smith, Southwest Chamber Music & Facing History and Ourselves

A child of the South who was raised in the red-hot crucible of the civil rights movement, **Wadada Leo Smith** has long contemplated creating an epic-scale opus exploring the struggle for African-American freedom and equality. With the three-night world premiere of “Ten Freedom Summers” at the REDCAT Theater in the Walt Disney Concert Hall Complex, Los Angeles on October 28-30, the visionary trumpeter and composer delivers his masterwork, a vivid, spiritually charged musical tapestry that celebrates the movement’s heroes and the turbulent era’s milestones, while also posing philosophical questions about the nature of democracy and equality.

“Ten Freedom Summers” is a collaboration between Smith’s celebrated **Golden Quartet** featuring pianist/composer **Anthony Davis**, bassist **John Lindberg** and drummer **Susie Ibarra**, and the acclaimed **Southwest Chamber Music** ensemble conducted by **Grammy Award-winner Jeff von der Schmidt**. The musicians will record the project in the days after the premiere for release on Cuneiform in the spring of 2012. In designing the sprawling multi-movement work, Smith focused on the formative decade framed by the landmark 1954 Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* that overturned the notorious *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision ratifying Jim Crow segregation, and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed many forms of racial discrimination.

“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,” says Smith, who is marking his 70th birthday with his most ambitious undertaking. “It was in that same environment that I had my first dreams of becoming a composer and performer.”

More than a three-night musical premiere, “Ten Freedom Summers” is a multimedia project that incorporates archival news footage and evocative but abstract cinematic imagery edited with a self-consciously musical sensibility. The production was inspired conceptually by August Wilson’s Pulitzer Prize-winning 10-play Pittsburgh Cycle, in which each play chronicles a decade of African-American life in the 20th century. Beyond being a passionate fan of Wilson’s work, Smith feels a deep personal connection to his plays as he provided the transcription of a 1920s Fletcher Henderson piece and contributed trumpet work to the original 1982 production of “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom,” a score created by saxophonist Dwight Andrews (a member of Smith’s ensemble New Delta Akhri who went on to collaborate frequently with Wilson).

“I own all 10 of Wilson’s plays and have studied them over the years,” Smith says. “Much like Wilson, what I’m trying to do is give a full impression, show the psychological transformation that America achieved. Each piece has its own motivation, and what ties it together is the psychological thread. Rather than taking 10 decades, I took 10 freedom summers.”

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The REDCAT premiere is the culmination of more than three decades of intermittent work, study and contemplation. Smith has divided the 18 movements into three thematic collections, "Defining Moments in America," "What is Democracy?" and "Ten Freedom Summers." With movements dedicated to the indomitable Mississippi Freedom Democracy Party leader Fannie Lou Hamer, the brutally slain teenager Emmett Till, and Montgomery bus boycott catalyst Rosa Parks, the first collection could just as easily be called "Heroes and Martyrs" as "Defining Moments."

Rather than offering answers, Smith further elaborated on his query "What is Democracy?" with movements exploring the Dred Scott decision and the nature of citizenship, the Sept. 11 attacks, and the assassination of NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers, who inspired the earliest piece included in the project (which Smith completed in 1977). The eponymous third collection keys into events that Smith vividly recalls, including the Freedom Riders, the Little Rock crisis, and Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in Memphis.

"I saw that stuff happening," Smith says. "Those are the moments that triggered this. I wrote those pieces as a way to fulfill and express what was inside of me."

Smith composed two movements during a Djerassi Foundation residency and five pieces during his 2009/2010 Fellowship with the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation. Funded by the James Irvine Foundation and Clarence E. Heller Charitable Foundation, Southwest Chamber Music commissioned four compositions. Smith also received major support from Chamber Music America with support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. The premiere and commission is also supported by the MAP Fund, and the recording is funded by the National Endowment for the Arts.

For Southwest Chamber Music, "Ten Freedom Summers" follows its unprecedented "Ascending Dragon Music Festival," the largest cultural exchange ever between the U.S. and Vietnam. Exhausted at the end of the project last year, Jeff von der Schmidt hadn't planned on jumping into another major undertaking. But once he started talking with Smith about his participation in the ensemble's 25th anniversary season, von der Schmidt realized that he had another singular opportunity to forge new creative ground.

"I had finished the project of a career, and here Wadada hits me with one that's just as rich, a major statement about the civil rights movement," Von der Schmidt says. "I've been blown over by the epic scope. This is an African-American Ring Cycle, three evenings, each bound up with the next. It's his vision, and it flows from his worldview and experiences. Remember, the Tallahatchie River, where they dumped Emmett Till's body, runs through the town where he grew up."

Born and raised in Leland, Mississippi, **Wadada Leo Smith** got his start playing trumpet in R&B bands, and by the mid 1960s had gravitated to Chicago's burgeoning avant-garde jazz community. An early member of the seminal AACM collective, he collaborated with a dazzling cast of fellow visionaries, including Leroy Jenkins, Anthony Braxton, Henry Threadgill, Anthony Davis and Oliver Lake. On faculty at Cal Arts since 1993, he has influenced several generations of improvisers and composers.

Recording prolifically over the past two decades, Smith released an acclaimed series of albums with guitarist Henry Kaiser inspired by the early 1970s fusion of Miles Davis. Since he founded the Golden Quartet with Jack DeJohnette, Anthony Davis, and Malachi Favors the group has undergone several incarnations, featuring prodigious young players such as pianists Vijay Iyer and Angelica Sanchez. His latest release is a captivating, avant funk double album by his Organic orchestra, "Heart's Reflections" (Cuneiform Records).

While Smith is known for his beautifully rendered graphic scores, he composed "Ten Freedom Summers" using traditional notation. Though true to his status as one of American music's most inventive composers, Smith's notation requires unusual discipline and improvisational skills.

"Time is determined when you play the piece," Smith says. "It liberates the player from having to count things. Everybody has the entire score, their parts and everybody else's. It is traditional notation with five lines to a staff, but it's a far cry from someone conducting a downbeat and moving across the score. It's a lot of responsibility, but that's what makes the world go round."

Southwest Chamber Music is no stranger to Smith's music. The ensemble performed two of his string quartets widely in 2000, and developed a lasting relationship with Smith. An ensemble of 15 musicians based in Los Angeles, the organization was founded in 1987 by Artistic Director Jeff von der Schmidt and Executive Director Jan Karlin. One of the most active chamber music ensembles in the United States, Southwest performs year round, provides educational programs, tours internationally, and has recorded 25 albums which have received two Grammy Awards and seven nominations. When von der Schmidt approached Smith about a possible commission for the ensemble's 25th season, he raised the possibility of something more ambitious.

"I asked them to come out to my house and showed them how far 'Ten Freedom Summers' had gotten," Smith says. "We spent four hours with scores all over the floor and table. I had no idea who would ever mount such a large collection."

In an historic collaboration, von der Schmidt and Southwest Chamber Music have risen to the challenge. After decades of being revered by his peers and colleagues, Smith is attaining his rightful place at the forefront of American music. "Every ensemble is like a planet in the cosmos," Smith has said, and with "Ten Freedom Summers" he has created a startlingly detailed universe that reflects upon the essence of what it means to be American, and what it means to be human.

TEN FREEDOM SUMMERS CONCERT INFORMATION:

Friday, October 28, 2011 *Ten Freedom Summers, Part One*
8:30 p.m.

Saturday, October 29, 2011 *Ten Freedom Summers, Part Two*
8:30 p.m.

Sunday, October 30, 2011 *Ten Freedom Summers, Part Three*
7 p.m.

Tickets: \$38 each evening general admission; \$28 each evening for students/CalArts Faculty/Staff,
<http://www.redcat.org/event/ten-freedom-summers> (213) 237-2800.

Facing History and Ourselves, an international organization dedicated to fighting racism, anti-Semitism and bigotry through education, will participate in a pre-concert discussion that will provide context for the performance. They'll also work with Southwest Chamber Music and Smith to bring this piece to schools. The organization has extensive resources that look at the role of individuals and their choices in the history of the civil rights movement.

www.wadadaleosmith.com

www.swmusic.org

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