



William Parker

Who Owns Music?

150 pages, ISBN: 978-3-00-020141-7

Published by [Buddy's Knife](#)

Bassist, composer, arts organizer, and educator William Parker has had a distinguished musical career. One of the premier exponents of avant jazz on the New York scene, he's recorded prolifically as a sideman and as a leader of small groups and large ensembles. For over forty years, Parker has also been active as a writer. *Who Owns Music?* is a collection of his poetry, reminiscences, and writings about the philosophy of music. Parker is an eloquent advocate of the intrinsic connection between art and the spiritual. He frequently likens advocacy for experimental music to a spiritual struggle. His words will no doubt be heartening news to artists who long for an elevated discussion about the religious impulse in music, sans positivist scoffing or, alternately, dogma and judgmental proselytizing.

For Parker, societal woes and artistic concerns are also linked. Thus his discussion of the ideals of improvised music and composition are interwoven with advocacy for civil rights, free speech, environmentalism, and arts education. The perils of music criticism, particularly the danger of poison pen tirades, are also taken up. Parker occasionally paints with too broad a brush here, giving a sense that he is indicting the majority of music critics. This is perhaps understandable in context; much unfair and ill-informed criticism has been levied at avant jazz in general and Parker in particular.

But, even here, he doesn't stray long from the positive, providing a manifesto that writers should take to heart. He writes, "The role of the critic is to become the poet. (S)he must find a plant and water it and care for it without crushing one blade of grass or one weed along the way."