



# ALL ABOUT JAZZ - NEW YORK

OCTOBER 1, 2010

*I Plan To Stay A Believer:*

*The Inside Songs of Curtis Mayfield*

William Parker (AUM Fidelity)

*At Somewhere There* William Parker (Barnyard)

*The Complete Recordings 1981/1983*

Commitment (NoBusiness)

by Jeff Stockton

Three releases document where bassist extraordinaire William Parker has been, where he is today and where he might be going, as a band member, bandleader and even as a one-man band. Parker's music is presented as pieces in a musical and artistic continuum that stretches back to the New York City Loft Jazz scene of the '70s, wraps around audiences across France and Italy and extends to a modest hall in Toronto. "It was never the goal to do a cover," William Parker writes in the notes to *I Plan to Stay a Believer: The Inside Songs of Curtis Mayfield*, as epic, exciting and lifeaffirming as any CD set you're likely to find, this year or any. Parker and his band of usual suspects (Hamid Drake, Leena Conquest, Lewis Barnes, Sabir Mateen, Dave Burrell, et al) use Mayfield's songs as a starting point, retaining the melodies and embellishing the rhythms, usually with Conquest's strong command of Mayfield's lyrics, before the band takes over the tunes and makes them their own. Great American poet Amiri Baraka declaims on behalf of the disenfranchised while the band reclaims the Great Black Music of the soul as their birthright. Overflowing with moments of uplift and transcendent interplay, nothing expresses the sense of hope and triumph as directly as the anonymous soloist from the New Life Tabernacle Generation of Praise Choir of Brooklyn whose fullthroated "This Is My Country" shows you that staying a believer is the only thing to do.

*At Somewhere There* is just Parker with his bass, double flute and doson'ngoni in front of 40 listeners. Any jazzman worth his salt feels the need to make a solo statement and Parker is no exception, having released several solo recordings in the past. On this outing, Parker slashes and bows his bass for 48 solid minutes, letting his instrument resonate and vibrate the air, as if discovering overtones and notes for the first time and allowing one discovery to suggest which step to take next. Tour de force or endurance test, the results are as impressive as they are exhausting and the brief palate-cleansing improvisations that follow are Parker at his unadorned best.

In 1980, William Parker was young and busy, jamming at small, long-forgotten venues in Downtown Manhattan, rehearsing with Cecil Taylor's ensembles

and sitting in at Studio Rivbea, Sam and Bea Rivers' legendary loft. Out of this environment Parker joined with like-minded players Jason Kao Hwang (violin), Will Connell, Jr. (alto, bass clarinet and flutes) and drummer Zen Matsuura to form Commitment, a collaborative that at its most basic combined Asian ideas of time-keeping and melody with African-American concepts of rhythm and drive. After three decades, the music holds up amazingly well and proves this ensemble's progressiveness. Exhuming their only album, the music on this two-CD set delivers graceful harmonies, delicate instrumentation and confident virtuosity paired with a previously unreleased live recording that shows how tight, arresting and purposeful the band could be on stage.

*The Complete Recordings 1981/1983* is a prime candidate for Unearthed Gem of the Year.

For more information, visit [aunfidelity.com](http://aunfidelity.com), [barnyardrecords.com](http://barnyardrecords.com) and [nobusinessrecords.com](http://nobusinessrecords.com). Parker is at Blue Note Oct. 4th with David S. Ware and The Stone Oct. 27th with Yuko Fujiyama. See Calendar.

**16 October 2010 | ALLABOUTJAZZ-NEW YORK**