

## Sardinia Suite

Written by Susan Grace Banyas

### Voices

David Ornette Cherry

Don Cherry

Paul Harris

Julius Fraser

Robert Grudin

Louise Steinman

Kahil El'Zabar

Neneh Cherry

### Music

David Cherry

Don Cherry

Ethnic Heritage Ensemble

### Visuals

paintings and photography by Susan Banyas



In the dream, some years ago, I am trying to get to the top of the mountain, a big effort. My distinguished allies are with me to offer support. *We are here, waiting for you.* An African wild man and a Lithuanian scholar. When I wake up, I paint them. As the painting comes into being, my dream men become J.T. Fraser and David Ornette Cherry, Poets of Time.



Julius Fraser, Cambridge, 2004



David Cherry, Portland, 2008

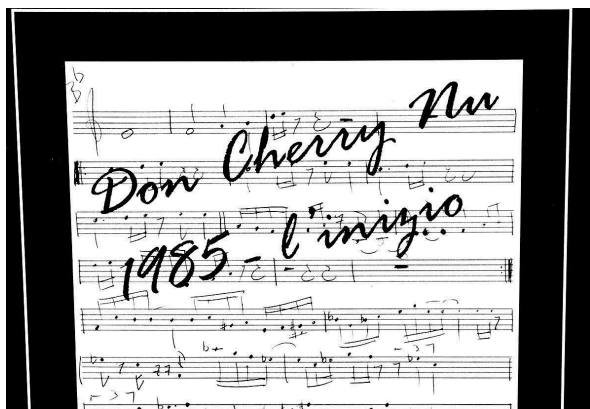
The location of the 2026 International Society for the Study of Time conference in Sardinia prompted this piece, a sequel to "You Have to Dig It to Dig It, Remembering David Ornette Cherry."<sup>1</sup>

David and I presented performances at two of the ISST conferences. But long before we met, the choreography of intersecting legacies was already in motion, like a music score, like a theory finding its way into being. A dream frames the action. The dance begins in Sardinia in 2008.

# 1 *In the Spirit of Don Cherry* Sant'Anna Arresi Jazz 2008

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<sup>1</sup> Time's News, 2022, vol 53, *The International Society for the Study of Time*



David invited me to join him and his LA group--Justo Almarino, Don Littleton, Ollie Elder Jr.—in Sardinia for the Don Cherry jazz festival. He wanted me to hear great jazz, train my ear, experience this music legacy of his adventuresome, innovative father, Don Cherry, the griot, who traveled the world to share and learn music, an ambassador of the *Organic Music Societies*.<sup>2</sup>

Sounds of cultures, through different instruments, in fresh combinations, in the amphitheater in the village square. One drummer sounds like eight, like an octopus drumming. *That's African*, David would say. *Beethoven was an African cat*, he would say.

The priest yelling at the musicians to stop the sound checks during mass, lavish lunch at a long table for a long time, limoncello for finale, diving into sparkling Mediterranean waves, ancient stone time music, wild, luminous tapestries by [Moki Cherry](#), Don's wife, mother, creative partner, hanging in the church --angels, devils, animal spirits—all One.

This was our first encounter with the Chicago Ethnic Heritage Ensemble, led by Kahil El'Zabar, Corey Wilkes on trumpet, Ernest Dawkins on saxophone, all multi-instrumentalists, a trio on a journey through soundscapes, places, times. David and I were struck by the energy and imagination of the group, akin to CODONA—Colin Walcott, DON Cherry, and NANÁ Vasconcelos—the trio who came together for three albums in the early 1980's—a trio that inspired both of us profoundly, long before we knew each other. The trios mirrored each other, and Sardinia was the place of transmission.

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<sup>2</sup> *Organic Music Societies*, Lawrence Kumpf and Magnus Nygren, editors, Blank Forms, Brooklyn, NY, 2022



Don Cherry: *The inside is out, and the outside is too.*  
[Togo](#), from *Old and New Dreams*, 1979



David Cherry: *It's simple. Creativity gets you out of the system's box.* [See You Nu](#) from *Organic Roots*, 2008





J. T. Fraser: *The mother lode of arts and letters is dance. Music is the audible dimension of dance....*<sup>3</sup>



## 2 *Time Piece*

Portland, Oregon, 1991

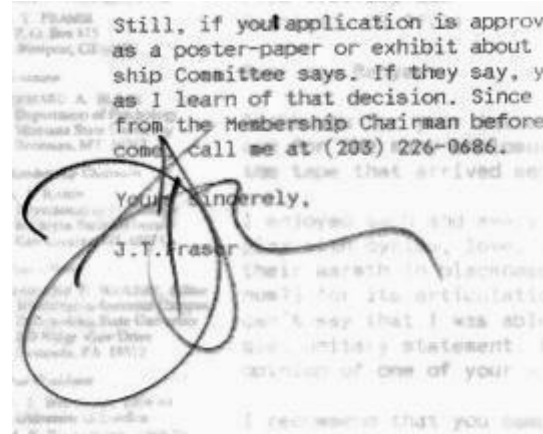
*dance theatre trio w. electronic soundtrack, drumming, vocals, film. one hour exactly, timed each night to end at sunset. natural light.*

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<sup>3</sup> "Time Felt, Time Understood," J. T. Fraser, *Kronoscope* 3:1 2003



The letter arrived on the letterhead, *International Society for the Study of Time* on thin paper, when we used typewriters and made carbon copies, from the *Founder*, J.T Fraser.



I had sent him a packet – my visual script, text, video excerpts, and a request, as a choreographer, to join the society.





Dear Dr. Fraser,  
 Robert Grudin suggested I write to you about a theatre work I created....a lyrical response to the questions time poses...what is it? ...an interdisciplinary society to look at this mysterious subject is far-reaching....

Dear Ms. Banyas:  
 I enjoyed each and every item...lively play...warmth...articulation... courage... I can't say that I was able to assembler these pieces into a single, unitary statement. But that is beside the point....

Robert Grudin was the matchmaker.



"To honor memory we must free it," he writes in *Time and the Art of Living*. "Rather than consult it, we must listen for it. It will tell us unequivocally what matters."

His book, my bible while making *Time Piece*, is structured in a modular form, a choreography of moments, thoughts, feelings, scenes. A Time Score.

I drove down to Eugene to meet him and shared a favorite quote from his book that he didn't remember writing. He drove up to Portland to see *Time Piece* and suggested I write to Julius Fraser about joining the Society of Time.

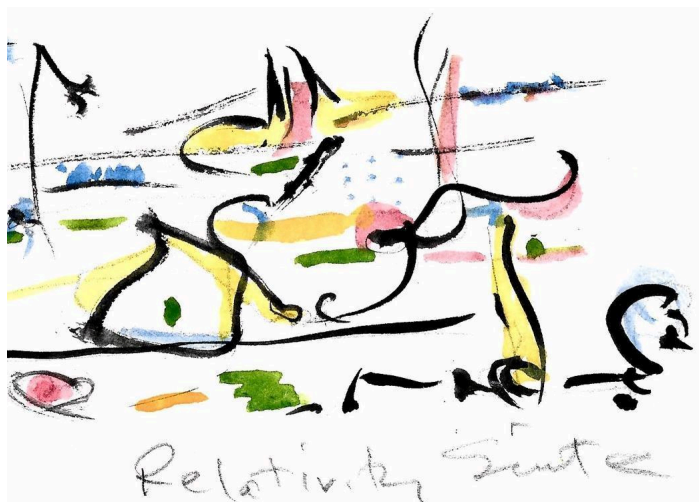
"Intimacy is to love what concentration is to work" he writes.<sup>4</sup>  
"a simultaneous drawing together of attention and release of energy,"  
The Art of Life. The Society of Time. A choreographer's dream.

Julius sent my material to the membership committee to decide if I could join without a PhD. I was graciously admitted, and the journey began.

J.T. Fraser: *Poetry is dance mapped into words; prose is poetry changed to shuffle, walk, or run; painting, sculpture, and architecture are snapshots of dance steadied by meaning; film is dance, music, literature and painting in virtual reality...every encounter with the mother lode entices us to scan our store of thoughts and feelings.*<sup>5</sup>

### 3 *Relativity Suite*

Dartmouth, 1970-71



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<sup>4</sup> *Time and the Art of Living*, p. 56, [Robert Grudin](#), Tichnor and Fields, NYC

<sup>5</sup> "Time Felt, Time Understood"



*Relativity Suite: Part 1*, Don Cherry, Organic Music Society, 1971

*We can be in tune with time.*

*We can be a slave to time.*

*Or we can be in total aspiration, trying to catch time.*

*There must be a fourth way—to flow with time.*

*This is the organic way; this is the way of the organic society—*

*To flow with time.*<sup>6</sup>

Paul Harris:<sup>7</sup> "Don was in residence at Dartmouth, where my father taught physics. Jon Appleton was a pioneering electronic musician and brought Don for a year to teach. It was an open experiment."<sup>8</sup>

"I was 8 years old. Neneh was a year younger. Eagle Eye, younger. My mother and Don and Moki became very close very quickly. I remember Don as the only person who got my usually shy and subdued mother to dance—they would try on different hats and dance around the room freely. Don also found inspiration talking with my dad, a theoretical physicist. Always interested in the cosmos, Don wanted to know more about relativity. When Don had the idea for an extended cosmic composition, I think my Mother suggested the title *Relativity Suite*.

"I remember a concert at Dartmouth's Hopkins Center with the whole family on stage, Neneh and Eagle Eye improvising and doing whatever they wanted. Don would also invite friends from the audience on stage to play. What I remember more than the events themselves is this communal, playful ethos, the joy Don and Moki spread.

"They had a farm house overlooking the Connecticut River, a few miles outside Norwich, Vermont, where we lived. The walls were covered in Moki's fabrics and instruments Don had collected from all over the

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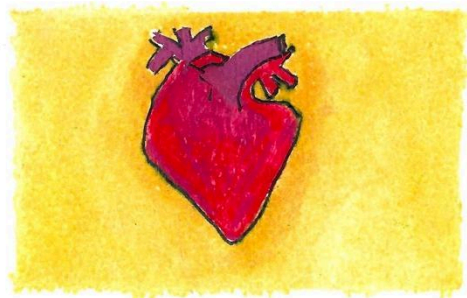
<sup>6</sup> "Relativity Suites," Ben Young, p. 402, *Organic Music Societies*, Blank Forms, 2022

<sup>7</sup> Conversation with [Dr. Paul Harris](#), February 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Don references "Professor Harris" and his vision of "a new university where when you came close to the university, you would hear this song and this sound. He related it to my class and that was like what we were developing into." From "Don Cherry at Dartmouth, a teaching report and interview with Keith Knox," p. 474, *Organic Music Societies*, Blank Forms, 2022.

world. Moki made him these vests that had all kinds of pockets for the instruments. So, Don would choose a bunch of flutes, recorders, percussion pieces; and we'd go in the woods and walk, and he'd listen and play with the ambient sounds—birds, wind, trees.

"When I hear *organic music*, whatever is coming out of that time and place is music. The heart sutra and science.



THE HEART

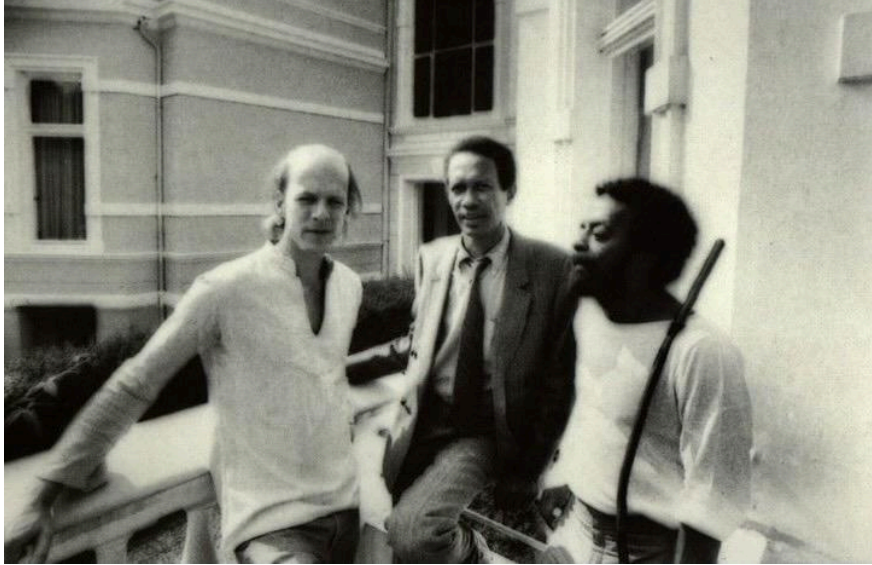


The Goldfish Bowl

"The first time I saw David play was when Don gathered the family for a band he called "Cherry Extract" to play at McCabe's Guitar Shop (Santa Monica) in 1989, with Jan (Cherry Spears) on violin. Eagle Eye on drums, and David playing reggae style keyboards.

"David later told me that his real musical transformation came when Don took him on the road with CODONA. CODONA was the sweet spot of all of it—world music, organic music, cosmic music. David resonated with CODONA, understood deeply the purity of notes and expanse of space and silence they created and how they blended musical strands into a global and cosmic consciousness. David incorporated that same depth and groove and vibe in his music."

*Doussin' Gounni' Fantasia*, David Ornette Cherry, *African American Grooves for the Common Man*, 1998



Collin Walcott, Don Cherry, Naná Vasconcelos,  
NYC, 1982, album photo

[Codona](#), CODONA, 1982

A million people marched to end nuclear weapons the summer of 1982—the biggest anti-nuke rally in the world. I came to join the protest from Ohio where I had just discovered the tiny diary of my Quaker great-great Grandmother, Elizabeth Conard Edwards, her delicate handwriting like snapshots. *No Strangers Here Today. Strangers.* Fugitives from slavery. Coded words covered the secret room in the cistern of a “safe house” on the Underground Railroad. History became personal and immediate.

CODONA was playing at in a small venue, maybe the village. The trio of sound guides on a journey of musical invention in the moment, in a marketplace, in landscapes, far away, yet familiar, completely mesmerizing. A complete convergence.

A calling.



memo  
 What Organic Roots means  
 to me is being at  
 peace in where I am  
 Spiritually and Musically  
 The CDS is very much  
 Inspired by Codona  
 (Don Cherry, Collin Walcott, and  
 Nana Vasconcelos)  
 Their music lead me on  
 a musical journey  
 that I continue to  
 be on.

JANUARY. 1864  
 1.  
 I arose this morning 10 min-  
 utes of 5 found it very cold.  
 Thermometer, 10 degrees below  
 zero blowing strong the thermometer  
 there in Adeline, the girls  
 sewing at Maria's dress were  
 sitting around, too cold to work.  
 2.

notebook, David Ornette Cherry Elizabeth Conard Edwards, 1864

J.T. Fraser: ...what is possible, difficult or impossible for humans made of matter, possessing life, and possessed by ideas....<sup>9</sup>

## 4 Ancestor Dance

Julius Fraser and I picked up our correspondence in 2003. He sent *Time Felt, Time Understood* and suggested I do an illustrated piece, with a title like *Images from a Library of Desires*.

I wrote back with an undefined Yes! and request for a recommendation letter for a grant to come to Cambridge to the *Time and Memory* conference.

### Cambridge 2004

I finally met the distinguished, delightful J.T. Fraser and ISST President Paul Harris.

Susan: "I met you there. The Time Society blew me away, the people the research, the comradery, like a kind of perfect idea."

Paul: "Cambridge was our biggest conference, at the highest academic place. What you did, I remember thinking, this is what time and memory actually are, how they work. Your performance—the seriousness,

<sup>9</sup> "Time Felt, Time Understood"

the joy of it—spoke deeply to the ISST audience of open and interested minds.”

I presented *No Strangers Here Today* as a movement essay, weaving Elizabeth Edwards’ words through the story of the abolitionist movement, a farm woman’s daily account, set against the imperial machinery of slavery and war, over a soundtrack by Miles Davis and minimalists.

I was struck by the quality of listening and reflection, how a political message came through this tiny diary, what I gleaned from others’ impressions of the realms of memory, like stones tossed into a pool of overlapping circles.

Julius wrote soon after the conference and encouraged me again to submit an illustrated essay... “I have an inaudible music...start with Elizabeth Conard Edwards, for which I thank you.”

The Ancestors were joining forces-- the Society of Friends and the Society of Time, nudging me forward, toward Los Angeles.

“You need a live musician,” Louise Steinman proclaimed. After Cambridge, I was encouraged to pitch *No Strangers* to Louise, who produced the series, ALOUD/LA at the central library.<sup>10</sup> She introduced me to David Cherry, then commissioned a duet. “I could see it,” she said. “It was only a hunch.”

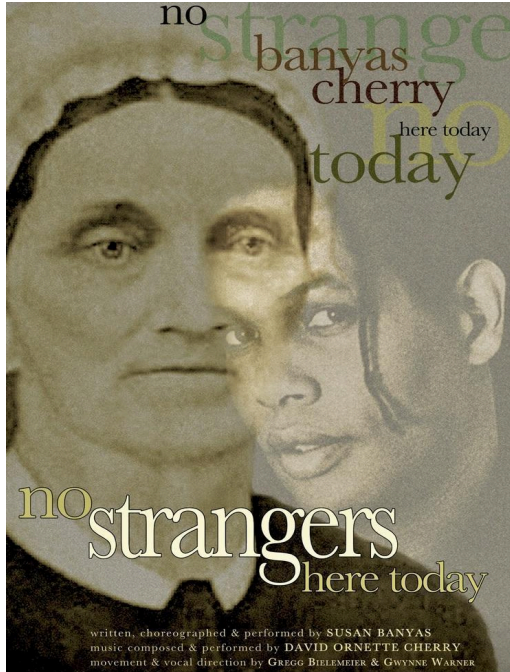
I handed David my visual script, and he handed me his *Organic Groove* CD, and history took off.

[First Time Out](#), David Ornette Cherry, Organic Groove, 2005

[No Strangers Theme](#), David Ornette Cherry, video excerpt by Jack Quincy Davis, 2007.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://louisesteinman.com/>



Highland County Ohio 1864



Watts Towers, 2007

### *Monterrey, July 2007*

Paul: "Meeting you in Cambridge in 2004 and then you turning up with David in Monterrey, that was just great."

Time bending discovery: the sons of early collaborators -- physics and free jazz -- are at a conference on time, *Constraints and Limits*.

My abstract:

*everyday dancing, a dance lecture  
the practice of moving thoughts and images  
through the body  
limits set up mind-body poetry  
naturally*

I was inspired by John Cage/*Lecture on Nothing*. But after I invited David Cherry to join me, the lecture went from neutral to surrealism in a heartbeat.



Paul: "I remember the joy of that performance--the space, the stage, you were both funny, playful with the audience, bringing everyone into a moment."

David led a clapping / chanting piece with the audience:

Time

Time is

Time is now

Time is now and

He took the show out with *Relativity Suite* on the grand piano, an astounding embodiment of creative flow and legacy in motion.

Julius came up to David after the show and started singing a Hungarian folk song that he remembered from his childhood. That was the moment when it all came together –two poets of time connecting through the vibrations of sound in an Ancestor dance.

David always remembered that it was a good thing we had lunch with the "Ohio people" (practical people) that day, who said they were looking forward to our performance that night. Our forks stopped in midair. We thought it was the next night and hustled out to get our act together.

## 5 *Spirit Gatherer*



A year after the Monterey conference, we were in Sardinia and heard the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble summon the spirits of Don Cherry and CODONA. The experience sparked a musical relationship between Kahil El’Zabar<sup>11</sup> and David with several performances together over the years.

In 2022, Kahil invited David to join the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble in a recording session in Chicago and live performance of *Spirit Gatherer, A Tribute to Don Cherry* at the London Jazz Festival. “Don was a genuine visionary and we have to celebrate what he taught us all,” Kahil said in an interview in *The Guardian* a few days before the show.<sup>12</sup>

David took the stage at the Barbican in London, with Kahil El’Zabar, Corey Wilkes, Dwight Trible, his sister Neneh Cherry<sup>13</sup> and nieces Tyson McVey and Naima Karlsson. “David was amazing,” Neneh said. “He went everywhere. The Ancestors were on stage with us. We could all feel it.” Two hours later, he collapsed in the lobby from an asthma attack and couldn’t pull out. “The Ancestors swooped him up,” Neneh said.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.kahilelzabaris.com/>

<sup>12</sup> “‘The baddest technician’: how Don Cherry is still making jazz new,” Ammar Kalia, *The Guardian*, Nov. 16,

<sup>13</sup> 2025 release of [new book](#)

Corey played the flute while David flew away.

The spirits who guided David's journey onwards, first appeared in musical form in Sardinia, in a dance with a perfect never-ending ending.



Sardinia 2008

David: "Don was my first teacher, and it was all about doing with him," he said in *The Guardian* interview. "After only a month of sitting next to him on the piano bench and learning by watching him play, he took me to a smoky club to perform. He was at the edge of the stage, blowing a deep sound from a big blue horn. I ran over and asked, 'when are we starting?' He looked at me, smiled and took it out of his mouth to say, 'it's already started.' "

[Degi-Degi](#), Don Cherry, *Spirit Gatherer: A Tribute to Don Cherry*, Ethnic Heritage Ensemble, Kahil El' Zabar, David Ornette Cherry, Corey Wilkes, Dwight Trible, 2022





Monterey, 2007

*Julius: These inner journeys join our memories together with them....  
form a network of paths or maps... balance between time felt and time  
understood...never final...continuously redrawn...*

© Susan Grace Banyas, February 22, 2025

Susan Banyas is a writer and choreographer. This essay is excerpted from  
[\*Mr. Music/theme and thought\*](#), a multi-media project in process.

[www.susanbanyas.com](http://www.susanbanyas.com)

Spotify

[Music Playlist](#)

[\*Togo\*](#), by Ed Blackwell with Don Cherry, Dewey Redman, Charlie Haden,  
*Old and New Dreams*, 1979

[See You Nu](#) by David Ornette Cherry with Justo Almario, *Organic Roots*, 2008

[Relativity Suite: Part 1](#) by Don Cherry with Christer Bothen, Bengt Berger, *Organic Music Society*, 1979

[Doussin' Gounni' Fantasia](#), by David Ornette Cherry with John Price, Mark London Sims, Ralph Jones, Jan Cherry, Francis Awe, Clarence Robinson, *African American Grooves for the Common Man*, 1998

[Codona](#), by Collin Walcott, Don Cherry, Naná Vasconcelos, *CODONA*, 1982

[First Time Out](#), by David Ornette Cherry, Justo Almario, Reggie Carson, Rahmlee, Don Littleton, Bobby Bradford, Ralph Jones, *Organic Groove*, 2005

[Degi-Degi](#), by Don Cherry, Kahil El' Zabar, Corey Wilkes, Dwight Tribble, David Cherry, *Spirit Gatherer: A Tribute to Don Cherry*, Ethnic Heritage Ensemble, 2022