

**Liner Notes: *Until That Morning Comes*
Harmony Holiday**

Fred and Lorenzo Moten announce: *The smile of life is a Blackbird. After laughter comes tears.* The kalimba framed between Phil Cohran's hands rolls notes like smiles, is shaped like a smile, narrows the cruel distance between speech and singing. Sam Cooke's grin writhes and descends, prying open a clenched grunt, a hope that has been stunted by spoken language. The pulsing sound of the man working on the chain gang, gagged with rhythm, blunted frenzy hammering into dance and hammer grinning its iron mirror into the drift of road, arrow of a flock of blackbirds so happy and high in the burden flying in a crescent of love cry and smiling their leaving song. Bye, bye, blackbird, Miles' trumpet smiles syllable by syllable, accessing the unrepentant joy in Black departure. The song, standard, becomes a countdown to starting anew as a fugitive in his interpretation, even our demons grin with its babbling happy interdimensional travel. And Sun Ra's version of the adjacent standard, *Smile* haunts so good it heals. *Smile when your heart is breaking, smile even though it's aching*, June Tyson sings, as if celebrating, broken news becoming good in her hinged dome of blue rhyme. The rhythm of forced joy joins that of forced labor and becomes mechanical, the machines smile at their leverage, women smile as revenge.

James Baldwin smiles as if gasping with light, as if possessed by his own electric light, ravishing and severe. You can meet him here in the burdened grin, get near his disaster euphoria, his infinite gasp, edge into glory with him for a spell. It will fade, grow distant, like Coretta at Martin's funeral making brief eye contact with Aretha Franklin who is on stage singing a requiem for him; the corners of Coretta's cornered lips rise almost imperceptibly, the light in her eyes turns from rigid to ambient and back, all in the fleeting cradle of Aretha's crescendo, impeccable Black widow oblivion overridden by tenderness. Malcolm smiles atop the camel as it turns him toward the camera, he waves and grins arrival in a veil of Mecca's light. His smile might be the most beautiful of all because it intended to scream while turning up, tuning to a two-way rage, total enjoyment and total dread united in the paradox of coming to life through being hunted, in the privacy of siege. Malcolm's is the smile of game as it escapes in a saunter, regal and exhausted with no aura lost in the field, his is the smile of knowing you are the temptation of Christ, the bait used to expose false prophets. He smiles past and through us, into the truth he represents and cannot defy.

Aunt Hester might have smiled just so, like mischief, like a mandate, like it should be impossible, but Black will triumphs in torment. Harriet Tubman might have marvel-grinned this way between reverie and running, like she had never been stolen, like she knew those chasing her were the captive ones. Malcolm X smiles exponentially, as if he's never been angry, as if his father hadn't been killed by the KKK, as if he'd never be betrayed, even by the people he knew were planning his murder. He smiles like the final liberation of mankind. Amina Baraka on television smiles like Amina in a Newark classroom teaching the Black Alphabet, coy and dangerous if you mess with her. She is completely herself. Nina has crimes in her showmanship grins, a trance, she can slice them into anything, laugh on command like a hero villain, *I know you are jolted*, she gloats. I know you are. Nina Simone's smiles are commands, she dares you to defy them. Fred Moten describes *ana* and *ma* and finds a joyous elegiac, a double hello smile, giggle, a mothering otherworldly greeting of a smile, one of birth and recoil. And Gil Scott-Heron, a sage born on April Fool's Day, smiles down, crooked, limping lymph and lune in the eyes, and such a caress, such a warm endless, oozing, sorrow about him. There's something similar about John Coltrane's smile, it looks like it hurts, sorrows (verb), it looks so modest it aches to see it, it looks like the pain in his teeth could strangle itself, like he is tentative about every step, always afraid of the relief that switches to agony once the face levels, he smiles like Johnny Hartman croons *my one and only love*, they smile together slow and unsure of what might be retrieved by enjoyment of the tenderness in pain, and what might be lost in it.

Marvin Gaye always on the verge of sobbing, uses his broad seductive smile to confess resentment and resentment, a desire to turn to trouble to escape his grief. A runaway smile. Mingus is rosining his bow and giggling with Eric

Dolphy about when he'll come home from Europe during a rehearsal. Black rehearsal smile. How the hearses smile en route to themselves. Dolphy never comes home from Europe except his fluting smile in *God Bless the Child*, which he plays as upward spiraling spells, kites frolicking in loving acapella. Betty Carter's sound of love brings troubled breeze, trebled breeze, unreasonable beauty lingering like an ah-ha never quite chased to its plateau or hot shoulders after a cold wind. Her ambivalence bites and releases and shadow bends to Nikki Giovanni, laughing by now, reluctantly, at Jimmy's joke about the holy ghost. Some of us are embarrassed by what we love and turn it into clichés to hide it, and some of us smile like parables with a quiet pride for anything and everything. The litany of Black smiling is getting like ennui, like one long never reversed sleep. The trickster here, Legba, Lee Perry cradled in his sun-on-water-in-summer laughter, turns you toward the broken joke. There you go, all dizzy, stomping toward the joke. Joking and tantruming, smiling like a tambourine, sinking into its wet skin like a bloodline, *borderline schizo*.

Jason's time, forever time, he's always about to sob with laughter, he hates the hot light Shirley Clarke has noosed around his mask, the way she lynches his divaism, even the skull behind him cackles bitterly, beautifully. He laughs at the camera laughing at him and exploiting his catastrophic euphoria for a window to jump out of, a widow to fall in love. His is the kind of grin you want as parachute, jellyfish, diaphragm, it gives you air and airs and heirs, dares you. Angela's fist raises as she enters the courtroom, on trial all her life, militant pin-up Ima win, grin. She smiles with her teeth, with her arm arrow. Imagine being charming while being held captive, so much so that the torment is impossible, watch. Rahsaan Roland Kirk laughs with me, dismisses the drama and shouts *brightmoments!* There are these shards of incomparable pleasure cutting through persecution with our own singing teeth. They become percussion, the up-spun beat of blackface between joy and self-deception. You have to hunt them, the beats like gate teeth. You have to blunt your shame at the possible minstrel you invent to hunt them. *You made us leave our happy home*, Nina sings, giggling with leftover spells in her lungs.

Despondency shows up as a sputtering casual giggle to oneself in public, Dick Cavett asks Jimi Hendrix what he wants next, he smiles his secret other world, laughing at the intimacy expected by near strangers and the strange obsessive public. What Jimi wants next is anonymity, estrangement, skipping off a cliff his smile dangles on a string, rescuing itself. Malcolm fell, smiling. He's on the gurney, grinning, you can't catch me. *Don't let the sun catch you crying*. Betty Carter's hollowed scat is a natural smile extending itself by breaking itself apart, she shares her joy and destroys its continuity. Her song is always about forgiveness, she's forgiving us in advance for being incapable of returning the favor. Her tone swoops, her furtive happiness is in its lift. To be devastated by our own enjoyment, as if it means we accept something, some pain that's been inflicted, as if we should always be half angry, caught between rage and healing laughter. How stifling it is to posture that way.

Sun Ra, Ogun, Abbey Lincoln, Miles jittering, Monk again, Aretha. Amiri Baraka, smiles to tell you *no*. Alice Coltrane transcends herself and smiles the smile you feel when looking at her. Nancy Wilson, Whitney Houston, Cecil Taylor, so aloof, Assata Shakur, disappear in joy.

Each break into joke, or grin, or growling laughter here is as theft, feels stolen, retracted, and to retrace and join them gives the sensation of bending time to the will of Black joy and celebrating all of its betrayals with an obnoxiously tender chorus of its survival. Suffering has never been noble, not outside of Christianity and western thought, Black life has never revelled in the Black soul's capacity for pain, it has risen to the occasion of expressing it and countering it with joy both authentic and caricature, often as self-defense. To follow that joy to nowhere, to no revolution but itself, to let it stand alone, makes it close to horrific with suspense, but also enjoyable, a strange uplifting diversion that could turn at any moment, that suggests when the telos is broken it will be with something terror-laden, like the more joy on display the more nervous you get that it might suddenly fade to some other condition of Black life, and when it doesn't, when all of the moods bleed together in an awkward semi-cathartic

laugh riot such as these images, a tide might rise in you, some small cynical corner of your spirit might be reprogrammed, you might never see every joy and sorrow sharing provocation.

Featuring

Fred Moten
Lorenzo Moten
Art Ensemble of Chicago
Phil Cohran
Bud Powell
Thelonious Monk
Sade
Sam Cooke
James Baldwin
Duke Ellington
Billie Holiday
Amiri Baraka
Abbey Lincoln
Miles Davis
Angela Davis
RZA
Rahsaan Roland Kirk
Ornette Coleman
Aretha Franklin
Dexter Gordon
Audre Lorde
Malcolm X
Naomi Campbell
Amiri Baraka
Fred Hampton
Zora Neale Hurston
Lauryn Hill
Marvin Gaye
Stevie Wonder
Richard Pryor
Muhammad Ali
Sun Ra
June Tyson
Martin Luther King
Charlie Parker
Amina Baraka
Maria Bethania
Kathleen Collins
Alice Coltrane
Etheridge Knight
Nina Simone

McCoy Tyner
Fannie Lou Hamer
Lee Scratch Perry
Ossie Davis
Ivan Dixon
Coretta Scott King
Betty Carter
Maya Angelou
Clifford Jordan
June Jordan
Miriam Makeba
Al Green
Mingus
Eric Dolphy
Jason Holiday
Dizzy Gillespie
Bob Kaufman
Don Cherry
Nikki Giovanni
Joseph Jarman
Marion Brown
Cry
Archie Shepp
Tupac Shakur
Jimi Hendrix
Whitney Houston
Mahalia Jackson
Tony Williams
Albert Ayler
Josephine Baker
Nancy Wilson
Sly Stone
Fela Kuti
Eartha Kitt
Toni Morrison
Cannonball Adderly
Ella Fitzgerald
Herbie Hancock
Gil Scott Heron
Cecil Taylor
Milford Graves
The Sandman
Lena Horne
Lisa Bonet
Alvin Ailey
Ray Charles
Ahmad Jamal

Assata Shakur
Bill Cosby
Cab Calloway
Kamau Brathwaite
Mary Lou Williams
James Brown
Katherine Dunham
John Coltrane
Kendrick Lamar
J Dilla
Sonny Rollins
Sonia Sanchez
Malik Favors
Birdie Africa
Bill T. Jones

Hard Time Killing Floor Blues

It gets so you feel beholden to facts and then you have to run faster He called the crisis a fantasy for how fast it beheld him some torrid springtime affair a fire a war and traumatic amnesia now it's safe to say *I'm hungry* in the back of the squad car I will not make this torment a muse I will not do it but we feasted to it ate one another alive Shipwreck is wild and held close shipwreck is going home here and it's sad that we're not at home

Hard Time Killing Floor Blues

Sun Ra said the route to true liberation is self-hate. He and his bandmates had a house in Philadelphia. They rehearsed all hours, and ate together, he had special recipes and everything, and they communed under Sonny's private governance. Our self-deprecating, self-loving Black oligarch returned them to forever. Ra took micro-naps between takes, woke up conducting. When they were in Lagos, Nigeria together he didn't want the other bandmates to go see Fela's shrine, but they went anyway. He would say they had not conquered themselves, had not risen above themselves and learned to deny their baser instincts and dumb, redundant curiosities, that they would eventually lose the ability to play his compositions as they were meant to be played and get kicked out of the band. Sun Ra's beauty is that he was never contrived. He meant these things, and they were true.

Hard Time Killing Floor Blues

And it's sad that I'm not at home.
And it's sad that I'm not at home
And it's sad that I'm not at home
And it's not at home
And it's not home
Tear gas started coming in
They were arguing
Killed all the other children

Survivor's guilt survivor's dread
Then cannot remember them for readiness

I just want some fruit and bread
And the crackling lingering heat
Of the bombing to bloom into something I cannot see
Or drum on the soil with sticks and rocks that bleed me
Cannot take the blood home with me
Cause it's sad that I'm not at home
Cause they bombed our house and I was inside

Like Malcolm's Valentine
Birdie

Uncanny North American Valentine they couldn't kill me
I felt

Too familiar
Cause it's sad they're not at home

I really rose out of the ashes to end up in the back of a police car asking for bread and mama
Cause it's sad that we're not at home

Hard Time Killing Floor Blues

When Jimmy Baldwin announces *they're killing all of my friends*, it's not supposed to sound as beautiful as everything sounds in his cadence. Genocide is not beautiful, it's not an aesthetic experience. The recountment should not be either. But to convince ourselves to remember we make it a dance. The first step is petting the blindfold, like it's a comfort, hunched and leashed, too shocked to beg for mercy, too proud, too disgusted. Soon you're on their land, a prop orchestra. Escape then, which is bloody, moon-bleached, futile. And if you keep the rhythm it all repeats until the machines are more efficient than human labor and they chase you away with filth and disease. Here I am, petting the blindfold, coaxing it to felt or velvet, knife between my knuckles, hoarding envelopes, listening to court transcripts, clapping at verdicts, or laughing, falling to my knees unrepentant. Every dream is a doomed awakening. Every bend toward shadow so lazy an intimacy. We don't preach revivalism. We don't ask them back. It's just sad that they're not at home.