

Dorothy Ashby's Enduring Legacy

by Jennifer Betzer

While sitting down to a water-front view and a cup of tea on Mackinac Island, I suddenly recognized the clever and lively harp playing from Dorothy Ashby's album (1932-1986) *Afro-Harping* (1968) resonating from the cafe speakers. These occurrences are becoming more common. Whether browsing the latest hip-hop releases or streaming an international synth-pop playlist, modern music fans are likely to enjoy hits influenced by Dorothy Ashby, the Black musician who pioneered jazz harp in the 1950s. Her innovative improvisatory style earned Ashby a successful career as a leader and side-player on a plethora of albums. First recorded as a jazz harpist, her music evolved to include funk-fusion and East Asian influences. Ashby's continued popularity is demonstrated not only by the many covers of her music by contemporary harpists but by the frequent sampling of her recordings across numerous modern genres outside of the harp world such as lo-fi hip-hop, synth-pop, and R&B.

While pushing the boundary of the harp's capabilities in the fifties and sixties, Ashby contributed much more that established her as a legend across many genres in current music. Ashby's advocacy for social change as expressed through the provocative theatrical productions she scored, her performances for events headlined by key revolutionary figures such as Rosa Parks and Malcolm X, and her participation in the fight to revitalize the Dexter Theater (after the destruction of the 1967 Detroit riots) all enhance her prominence. It is both the music and the person that musicians choose to represent as they are continually drawn to and reinterpret her work. This article will explore her legacy and the four principal ways it continues to grow: first, a trove of recordings that not only show her mastery of the harp and jazz, but chronicle her growth as a musician; second, a discussion of the impact her music had on later generations of harpists; third, the influence her music had on contemporary and later non-harpist musicians; and finally, a look at how current pop and hip-hop artists have adopted her recordings as samples within their own work.

Ashby was raised in Detroit, where she first

learned jazz from her father, jazz guitarist Wiley Thompson.¹ She was later exposed to the harp at Cass Technical High School in the class taught by Velma Froude (1912-1993).² She went on to study piano and music education at Wayne State University.³ After successfully earning enough as a pianist to buy her own harp, Ashby formed a jazz group called the Ashby Trio.⁴ Although it took some time to be accepted into jazz clubs as a harpist, she was eventually heard performing by the Count Basie Orchestra's flutist and saxophonist, Frank Wess. In 1957, Wess asked Ashby to cut a record with him playing flute, a partnership that continued for two more albums. It was Wess's early collaborations with Ashby that helped launch her successful recording career.

Developing a Distinctive Voice: The Legacy of Ashby's Recordings

Ashby's albums perpetually pushed the harp in new directions, spanning bebop to fusion and covering numerous genres in between. Ashby's eleven full-length albums chronicle her move from straight-ahead club musician to pioneer of the outer reaches of experimentalism. Her imaginative mastery of the harp, both in solo and trio recordings, have inspired harpists to revisit her original compositions and her equally creative arrangements of others' music. But it is her later exploratory experimentalism that has gained wider notice outside the harp world. Beginning with *Afro-Harping*, the later recordings created an other-worldly soundscape that continues to attract artists in a variety of contemporary genres.

1 Little is known of Wiley Thompson, including his dates of birth and death.

2 W. Royal Stokes, "Strings," in *Living the Jazz Life*, New York: Oxford University Press (2000), 157.

3 Carrol McLaughlin, "Jazz Harpist Dorothy Ashby," *American Harp Journal* vol. 8 no. 4 (1982): 32.

4 Members of the Ashby Trio varied from recording to recording. She was accompanied often by her husband, the drummer John Ashby, who went by John "Tooley" so as not to detract attention from Dorothy. On drums, she was also accompanied by Ed Thigpen, Roy Haynes, Grady Tate, Arthur Taylor, and others. Herman Wright was the bassist who played most often with the group. Other bassists included Wendell Marshall and Eddie Jones.



Dorothy Ashby Trio, June, 1971. E. Azalia Hackley Collection, Detroit Public Library.

Ashby's first three albums with Frank Wess, much of them consisting of popular standards, established her as a straight-ahead jazz artist, but one who stood out due to the timbre of her instrument. *The Jazz Harpist* (1957), *Hip Harp* (1958), and *In a Minor Groove* (1961) all feature Ashby on harp and Wess on flute, supported by a rhythm section of bass and drums. All three albums share a similar style of walking bass lines and swinging ride patterns, extending the small-group swing sound that emerged on New York's 52nd street in the late 1940s, but with harp in place of piano. These debut albums established Ashby's agility in bebop and her sensitivity in communicating across an ensemble.

Following her collaborations with Wess, Ashby recorded three more albums in a similar straight-ahead style; with Wess's flute gone, Ashby stepped unambiguously into a leading role. These three albums expanded the familiar palette of the standard jazz trio through the harp's distinct timbre, but also through the addition of other novel instrumental colors, hinting at Ashby's future exploratory directions. The self-titled *Dorothy Ashby* (1961), for

example, adds a few percussion instruments such as congas and chimes to her standard trio of bass, drums, and harp. Ashby continued to broaden the timbral colors of her recordings with *Softwinds* (1961), including Terry Pollard on vibraphone, and *The Fantastic Harp of Dorothy Ashby* (1965), using a quartet of trombones.

Following *The Fantastic Harp*, Ashby's work took a sharp stylistic turn. This shift was due in no small part to her signing with the Cadet label, a subsidiary of Chess; Ashby was now working with the producer Richard Evans, and her music embraced not only funk and soul, but also included experimental elements taken from electronic music, non-Western musics, and techniques borrowed from the classical avant-garde. Ashby's new direction resulted in the album *Afro-Harping*, in retrospect now considered Ashby's most influential recorded statement, incorporating theremin and a technique called echoplexing. This tape delay effect is a type of intentional reverb that was first created in 1959 and was built into a guitar amplifier. The unique

combinations of sounds make it one of the most popular of Ashby's albums to sample.

The third album of the Evans set, *The Rubáiyát of Dorothy Ashby* (1970), notably Ashby's only album consisting exclusively of original compositions, fused nontraditional instruments (such as the koto, a Japanese zither) and featured Ashby not just on harp, but also on vocals. Ashby demonstrates in this album her awareness of cutting-edge currents in jazz, and how many artists of the era were consciously expanding their color palette with sounds from non-Western sources. *The Rubáiyát* also included Stu and Fred Katz on kalimba,⁵ cellos, violins, and the recently invented boobam.⁶ Ashby uses a variety of vocal styles from classical operatic vibratos to speech style singing, or *Sprechstimme*.⁷ For lyrics she uses the words of the Persian poet, Omar Khayyam (1048-1131) from his *Rubáiyát* (quatrains), a work popularized in the English-speaking world through the adaptation by Edward FitzGerald (1809-1893). The text of the original *Rubáiyát* conveys Khayyam's feelings about life, love, death, and religion. He alludes to the brevity of life, its pleasures, and the inability to alter the past, a stance that Ashby echoes in her original composition "The Moving Finger."

Ashby's final two albums, *Django/Misty* and *Concierto de Aranjuez*, were recorded in 1984, just two years before her death, and revisit her earlier sounds of straight-ahead jazz but now pared down to solo harp. Both albums consist almost entirely of Ashby's interpretations of jazz standards: there are no Ashby originals on *Concierto*, and *Django/Misty* has just one: "Blues for Mr. K."

A New Language for the Harp

Ashby gave the harp community a rich legacy of arrangements and compositions with complex harmonies and catchy rhythmic riffs that continue to entice modern-day harpists. Carol Robbins, who studied and performed with Ashby; Brandee Younger, who has championed Ashby's work; Sarah

Voynow, who recorded covers of her tunes; and Destiny Muhammed, Tara Minton and Stina Hellberg, who curated programs around arrangements of Ashby's songs, have all contributed to keeping the legacy of Ashby alive. While Robbins recorded no covers of Ashby tunes, one of her original compositions is a tribute to Ashby.⁸ What is more, the complex chord changes and the mixed genres of her work reflect Ashby's influence. She gave Ashby credit for this influence in her article "Lessons with a Legend" for the *Harp Column* in 2020.⁹ Younger has covered two Ashby tunes on recent recordings and she frequently performs Ashby's music in concert. Voynow recorded three Ashby tunes on her album *I'm Just a Lucky So and So* (2016).

In the harp world, Ashby's legacy also endures through live performances by current harpists of her original compositions and her recorded interpretations of others' work. In concert, Muhammed performed an Ashby tribute concert in 2014, duo harpists Minton and Hellberg added new bass and drum parts in their cover of Ashby's "Games" at their London concert in 2018, and Alina Bzezinska performed *Afro-Harping* in its entirety at her concert, also in London, in 2019.

Discovery by Non-Harpists

Ashby's impact on the harp world has clearly been far reaching. But more surprising is how far her influence stretches beyond the harp community. One initial avenue to this expanded recognition was undoubtedly Ashby's extensive contributions to Stevie Wonder's well-loved hit "If It's Magic" on the album *Songs in the Key of Life* (1976). Of Ashby's work Wonder said: "When we finally got 'If It's Magic' to work, it was because of the greatness of Dorothy Ashby. . . . She just did something incredible. She let the harp sing."¹⁰ In live shows following Ashby's death, Wonder continued to perform with the recorded track of Ashby as a tribute to her.

But the music that captured the attention of many young artists were the tracks in which Ashby fused funk and soul with traditional jazz. The Brussels-based soul jazz revival artist Supafly 5et

5 An African instrument from the Mbira family that consists of metal tines over a wooden board and is plucked with the thumbs.

6 Created in the mid 1950s by instrument inventor and composer Harry Partch (1901-1974), the boobam consists of an array of tubes with a membrane stretched over one side of the tube and open on the other.

7 A dramatic vocalization intermediate between speech and song also known as *Sprechgesang* likely familiar to Ashby through the Cass Tech harp and voice program.

8 "Blues for Dorothy" from Carol Robbins *Chords in Blue* (CD Baby, 2000).

9 Carol Robbins, "Lessons with a Legend: How Jazz Great Dorothy Ashby Changed My Life," *Harp Column* vol. 29, no. 1 (July-August 2020): 10-11.

10 Brian McCollum, "Stevie Wonder talks 'Songs in the Key of Life,'" *Detroit Free Press*, November 16, 2014.

covered two of Brandee Younger's Ashby arrangements, including her version of Ashby's "Soul Vibrations," from *Afro-Harping*, in a live performance on September 25, 2018 at the Jazz au Stade. The experimental jazz quartet NCY Milky Band recorded the tribute track "Dorothy Ashby & Both Worlds," demonstrating the impact on later artists of Ashby's groundbreaking fusion of funk and soul with traditional jazz. This track is a cover mashup of Ashby's "Myself When Young" and Eddie Harris's seminal "Freedom Jazz Dance," as played by the fusion band Both Worlds on their 1977 album *Don'tcha Hide It*.¹¹ NCY Milky Band released the track on their video series *Our Gurus* on February 7, 2020. In New York City, the avant-garde artist Ka Baird covered the Ashby original "Heaven and Hell" from *The Rubáiyát of Dorothy Ashby* on her 2020 album *Bespire*. Ka Baird's work includes, as Ashby's did in *The Rubáiyát of Dorothy Ashby*, the incorporation of numerous influences, breaking her music free of any specific genre.

Creating a New Audience for Ashby's Music

Dorothy Ashby's expansion into soul and funk, experimental, and world music over the course of her recording career ultimately gained her a place among a community of "classic R&B" musicians whose sounds current artists wished to capture and honor in their original works. In this way Ashby's music continues to influence new genres and reach new audiences through current artists who sample her work. Sampling is the technique of placing clips of recordings into new recordings and is utilized across many genres. Samples can be incorporated in their original form, layered with other effects and/or manipulated by speeding up, slowing down and changing the pitch of the original recording. As early as the 1940s, a process like sampling began with splicing and looping tape in experimental music. The term sampling was coined in the 1970s by the

creators of a synthesizer that could record and play back short sounds.¹²

Current popular hip-hop artists in the United States and abroad frequently embed Ashby's playing in the backing track of their raps. J Dilla,¹³ also known as "Jay Dee" and called "one of the music industry's most influential hip-hop artists,"¹⁴ was one of the earliest to sample Ashby's work in the 1990s, thereby exposing many artists to her through his music. A native Detroiter, Dilla would have been aware of Ashby's significant role in that city's jazz scene and in her local work for social justice. Dilla was also influential as the producer for many well-known artists, including Janet Jackson, The Roots, Daft Punk, Mos Def, and Busta Rhymes. Opening the floodgates to sampling Ashby's work in hip hop, many of the artists Dilla produced utilized her work such as Drake, The Pharcyde, The Jam, 5-elementz, and Common. Her work is also sampled by artists in various other genres such as low-fi, synth-pop, indie-pop, techno, electro funk and house music. One could argue that Ashby has achieved greater renown thirty-five years after her death than she did during her lifetime, thanks to the art of sampling and its practitioners. A look at five of the most often sampled tunes shows how Ashby's legacy continues to influence artists in a new century.

1. DJANGO/MISTY: "DJANGO" AND "AMOR EM PAZ"

J Dilla sampled many of Ashby's recordings in his music but also became the producer for the alt-hip-hop group The Pharcyde, who used Ashby's music as well. Throughout their hit single "Drop" (1995) The Pharcyde use a sample of Ashby's recording of "Django"¹⁵ from her 1984 album *Django/Misty*.¹⁶ According to band member Emandu Wilcox (Imani), "the whole concept of the video is BACKWARDS!"¹⁷ The Ashby sample is played backwards throughout the track. Against this resonant but unobtrusive

11 The title of Ashby's composition is taken from stanza XXVII of *The Rubáiyát*: Myself when young did eagerly frequent/Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument/About it and about; but evermore/Came out by the same door where in I went. *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyam*, translated into English Verse by Edward Fitzgerald, International Pocket Library, ed. Edmund R. Brown (Boston: Branden Publishing Company, 1992), 20.

12 The Fairlight CMI (Computer Musical Instrument) was a synthesizer and audio workstation created by the Sydney based company Fairlight.

13 James Yancey (1974-2006).

14 Ed Gordon, Christopher Johnson, Maureen Yancey, "Hip-Hop Producer, Rapper Jay Dee AKA J Dilla," *NPR*, February 14, 2006, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5205096>.

15 "Django" was composed by Luis Bacalov (1923-2017) for the 1966 film of the same name.

16 From the Album *LabcabinCalifornia* (Delicious Vinyl, 1995).

17 Spike Jonez, *The Making of the Pharcyde's "Drop"*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CBsxCUhNu0>.

modal backdrop,¹⁸ the group famously was filmed moving backwards down a city street while rapping all of their lyrics backwards (having been coached by a privately hired linguist). Their movements included actions such as taking off their clothes and interacting in distinctive ways with their environment. In the final version the footage is played in reverse, showing clothes flying from the ground back onto the band members' bodies, and the surrounding streetscape also moving in reverse. While Ashby's contribution to the overall sound is a fundamental musical and conceptual component, it is so disguised as to make it anonymous.

While The Pharcyde's use of Ashby's music was noteworthy, J Dilla's choice of her later solo recordings was atypical—in fact, there are only a couple of other instances of artists sampling *Django/Misty*. In general, current artists gravitate more towards the work Ashby did with Richard Evans, likely because of its expanded sound world and more explicit associations with funk, soul, and R&B. In his 2013 track "Ergo" self-proclaimed "Hi-Fi beat pedlar" Birocratic¹⁹ uses Ashby's recording of "Django," as well as her recording of Antonio Carlos Jobim's²⁰ "Amor em Paz" from the same album. The piece progresses with a series of three five-second loops of Ashby samples from the two tracks arranged in a symmetrical pattern, returning to the second sample loop after the third and ending with the first. There is a slightly longer version of the second sample that extends to include a melodic turnaround on its last repetition creating a compelling transition into the third sample. In this track Ashby's playing can be heard distinctly behind added sparse musical layering. R&B singer Ryan Trey (b. 1999) covers "Amor em Paz" and features a sped-up clip of Ashby playing prominently in the introduction, including rolled chords, trills and arpeggios. When the first verse begins, Trey continues to use Ashby but blends a shorter arpeggio clip with both an electric bass line and steady beat. Her earlier ensemble albums like *Afro-Harping*, in contrast, are both dynamic in the variety of instruments and timbres and anchored on the forefront of a jazz revolution.

18 Danny Veebens, "Dilla Samples #3: Dorothy Ashby-Django (1962, Argo Records)," *In Search of Media*, May 10, 2018. <https://insearchofmedia.com/2018/05/10/dilla-samples-3-dorothy-ashby-django-1962-argo-records>.

19 Brandon Rowan (b. 1993).

20 Antonio Carlos Jobim (1927-1994), Brazilian bossa nova composer.

One other borrowing from *Django/Misty* is notable: Ashby's influence is widely felt in lo-fi hip-hop, a genre that fuses elements of jazz and traditional hip-hop.²¹ Jinsang²² is a California beatmaker who uses Ashby's music frequently in his calmer lo-fi style releases and embeds Ashby's "Amor em Paz" harp solo in his enormously popular song, "Affection" (2016). The aesthetic of lo-fi is less produced, a quality that may have led Jinsang to Ashby's solo albums. Ashby's playing, accompanied by a simple rhythmic beat, is the primary material for this track. Jinsang alternates a looped harmonic sequence, featuring bass arpeggios, with a longer melodic clip over bass triplets.

2. "COME LIVE WITH ME"

"Come Live with Me," arranged by Richard Evans on *Afro-Harping*, is the most highly sampled recording of Ashby's tracks. The tune originally written by André Previn and released in 1967, was part of the soundtrack for the box office hit *Valley of the Dolls*. This track is likely a popular choice with current artists because Ashby's melodic lead is so clearly defined while still complemented by the funky rhythmic percussion that has made the album so well loved. These features make the piece easy for musicians to layer with their own work. This album is a pivotal choice, not only for marking a stylistic shift but also as the first album Ashby released after the 1967 Detroit riots.

Brazilian-Portuguese rapper MC Ary uses Ashby's "Come Live with Me" in his track "Vou Voltar Tarde" (2014), skipping the introduction and featuring a twenty second sample from the first harp entrance looping throughout as the backing track for his rap. Australian rapper GMC uses Ashby's "Come Live with Me" in his track "Melbourne City" (2012), similarly skipping to the harp entrance and using an extended sample on loop but adding several scratches in the first ten seconds. Ashby's version of "Come Live with Me" also makes an appearance in R&B and soul with Paula Campbell's (b. 1981) "Won't

21 Lo-fi refers to the production quality of the music. It intentionally incorporates elements usually regarded as imperfections. According to the online Urban Dictionary, Lo-fi is also "characterized by the high-utilization of elements such as introspection and seeks to engage with elements of human emotion. Elements such as high distortion as well as mellow sounds are more prominent features of any lo-fi hip-hop soundtrack." <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=lofi%20hip-hop>.

22 Benjamin Tran (b. 2002).

Love You Back” (2006). Campbell loops a similar sample to GMC’s and MC Ary’s. However, the tune shifts to an additional extended sample for the bridge in a different key and back for the chorus. A third sample from the same piece is also featured for a longer harp outro.

3. “THE WINDMILLS OF YOUR MIND”

Another track sampled by several artists is Ashby’s recording of “The Windmills of Your Mind,”²³ recorded shortly after “Come Live with Me” on the 1969 album *Dorothy’s Harp*. The tune begins with a beefy solo harp introduction appealing to many modern artists for its full descending arpeggios and rich harmonic chord changes. The introduction is followed by a catchy harp groove well punctuated with short electric guitar comping and ancillary rhythm. J Dilla samples the groove from the first verse of “Windmills of Your Mind” in his “Jay Dee 3” from the 2015 album *The King of Beats*, Vol. 1. But while Dilla uses the first verse, the harmonically rich introduction is more frequently sampled. Drake,²⁴ for example, uses this sample in his “Final Fantasy” (2018) from the album *Scorpion*. He uses the sample continuously throughout the first half of the song. In “Locked” from the 2002 album *Won*, the artist Pacey²⁵ also begins with Ashby’s introduction but continues to rap over most of the tune throughout the entirety of his track. Hip-hop beat-box and rap artist Rahzel²⁶ samples the same tune but uses clipped ascending arpeggios repeatedly in his song, “All I Know” (1999). Chilean rap collective Sabotage was also drawn to the introduction. They loop the sample throughout the 2015 recording “Vienen” from the album *Cuestion De Tiempo*. The Polish rap group Dinal, featuring Lilu,²⁷ uses shorter clipped and sped-up samples of the same piece in their recording “Ty” from the album *W Strefie Jaramania* (2006).

4. “BY THE TIME I GET TO PHOENIX”

Canadian indie-pop and synth-pop artist Monsune²⁸ and American rapper Common²⁹ both use

“By the Time I Get to Phoenix”³⁰ from *Dorothy’s Harp* in distinctive ways. Monsune took Ashby’s music into new territory with his blend of samples called “Nothing in Return” (2017). The track layers samples from many artists but prominently features several from Ashby’s version of “By the Time I get to Phoenix.” Monsune alternates two different sequences of the same riff and also layers glissandi from the track on top. He considers this track to fit both the genres of pop and “plunderphonics,” a term coined in 1985 by composer John Oswald (b. 1953) meaning “audio piracy as compositional prerogative.”³¹ Monsune chose the term because his music relies so heavily on samples from soul and pop. In an interview with a Ryerson University television station, Monsune explained that when artists borrow freely they “can use nostalgic sounds and reimagine them in a modern context.”³² Although in a contrasting genre, Common also alternates two “Phoenix” samples in his “Start the Show” from the 2007 album *Finding Forever*. Both artists layer in a sample of the flute riff played by Lennie Druss from the same Ashby track.

5. “THE MOVING FINGER”

While *Dorothy’s Harp* is rich with soulful and groovy material to sample, “The Moving Finger” offers groundbreaking experimental material as the final track from the 1970 album *The Rubáiyát of Dorothy Ashby*.³³ The addition of Ashby’s voice and koto to the jazz funk fusion style of the tune has captivated several artists across many genres. “The Moving Finger” is not only used in hip-hop but in techno, electro-funk, and house music. This eclectic piece lends itself to a wide variety of sampling as it moves from Ashby’s trance-like spoken word in the introduction to funk fusion, featuring solos on koto, vibraphone, saxophone, kalimba, and flute. J Dilla, an Ashby devotee, uses “The Moving Finger” in his

23 Composed by Michel Legrand (1932-2019), and introduced in the film *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968).

24 Aubrey Drake Graham (b. 1986).

25 Jerome Derek Hinds Jr. (b. 1978).

26 Rozell Manely Brown (b. 1964).

27 Aleksandra Agaciak (b. 1981).

28 Scott Zhang, (b. ca. 2000).

29 Lonnie Rashid Lynn (b. 1972).

30 Composed by Jimmy Layne Webb (b. 1946).

31 John Oswald, “Plunderphonics, Audio Piracy as Compositional Prerogative,” paper read at the Wired Society Electro-Acoustic Conference in Toronto, 1985. <http://www.plunderphonics.com/xhtml/xplunder.html>.

32 Sarah Chew, “Exclusive: Interview with Monsune’s Scott Zhang,” RUTV (Ryerson University Television) News, November 17, 2017. <https://rutvnews1.wordpress.com/2017/11/17/exclusive-interview-with-monsunes-scott-zhang>.

33 For a fuller appreciation of Ashby’s *The Rubáiyát*, see Stephen Anderson, “Dorothy Ashby’s Harp Masterpiece,” *Vinyl Me Please*, May 26, 2021. <https://magazine.vinylmeplease.com/magazine/dorothy-ashby-liner-notes>.

work “1 for the Treble and 2 for the Bass” (2005), focusing on a kalimba sample with a short passage of Ashby’s voice at the end. DJ Spinna³⁴ and Shadowman³⁵ also sample Ashby’s voice from “The Moving Finger” in their electro-funk tune “Drive” (2002). Similarly, German record producer Siriusmo³⁶ samples Ashby’s spoken word introduction from “The Moving Finger” in his techno song “The Uninvited Guest” (2009), and Polish rapper KęKę³⁷ uses the same spoken introduction a bit differently in his track “Z Boku” (2013). He adds in a scratching effect, emphasizing the rhythm of Ashby’s words and loops this clip throughout. British DJ and producer Leon Vynehall presents samples of the piece in his House music track “Saxony” (2016). While KęKę, Siriusmo, DJ Spinna and Shadowman all use samples focused on Ashby’s voice, Vynehall samples both her spoken words and short harp arpeggios in his introduction and several clips of Ashby’s voice. Each is interspersed and layered with a barrage of samples and beats. Perhaps the variety and frequency with which this single Ashby song has been used in recent years is the best example of Ashby’s enduring musical legacy.

The use of Dorothy Ashby’s music in sampling has evolved from its first unrecognizable appearances in the 1990s. In addition to the backwards sample used in The Pharcyde’s “Drop” already mentioned, Pete Rock³⁸ used a similarly disguised Ashby sample in his 1992 “For Pete’s Sake,”³⁹ although he later sampled Ashby in a far more prominent way in several other tracks (“What You Waiting For,”⁴⁰ “The Boss,”⁴¹ and “Harps of Heaven”).⁴² Similarly, Jay-Z⁴³ in 1998 used a two second clip of an Ashby glissando halfway through his “A Million and One Questions (Premiere Remix)”⁴⁴ that barely registers as a sample. However, over time Ashby’s musical presence has become increasingly more prominent in various artists’ borrowings—for example, artists

like Monsune (“Nothing in Return”) even began to combine multiple layers of different Ashby harp samples. The use of multiple Ashby samples within the same track is not only achieved through layering, but by alternating clips, so that the harp is heard throughout, as in Paula Campbell’s “Won’t Love You Back,” Jinsang’s “Affection,” and Birocratic’s “Ergo.” In some cases, as in Pacewon’s “Locked,” nearly her entire original track is used. Additionally, the number of samples artists have chosen to use within their tracks has grown, as have the genres that incorporate Ashby’s work.

Although not an exhaustive list, the artists above demonstrate that, well beyond her life span, Ashby’s music continues to fuse with new genres and styles in creative ways that push the limits of audience’s expectations. As Del Shields affirmed in the *Afro-Harping* liner notes, “she refuses to bow to the establishment that says make no waves.”⁴⁵ Her music is as relevant to today’s music scene as it ever was. Thirty-five years after her death, Ashby continues to stretch boundaries as her work is reimagined in new forms.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After completing her doctoral dissertation, “*The Innovation and Influence of Jazz Harpist Dorothy Ashby (1932–1986)*,” Dr. Jennifer Betzer was recently appointed an instructor of the Urban Youth Harp Ensemble through the Drew Charter School in Atlanta, Georgia. During the summers Dr. Betzer performs daily for high tea and demitasse at the Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island. ■



34 Vincent E. Williams (b. 1971).

35 Gernard Barr.

36 Moritz Friedrich (b. 1976).

37 Piotr Siara (b. 1983).

38 Peter O. Phillips (b. 1970).

39 Pete Rock and C.L. Smooth, *Mecca and the Soul Brother* (Greene Street Studios, 1992).

40 Pete Rock, *PeteStrumentals* (Greene Street Studios, 2001).

41 Ibid.

42 Pete Rock, *Return of the SP1200* (Audio Alchemist Hitar Studio, 2019).

43 Shawn Corey Carter (b. 1969).

44 Jay-Z, *A Million and One Questions* (single) (Roc-A-Fella Records, 1998).

45 Del Shields, liner notes to *Afro-Harping*, Dorothy Ashby, Cadet Records, 1968.