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Wadada Leo Smith's Golden Quartet Tabligh

By [Steve Greenlee](#)

Wadada Leo Smith reconfigured his Golden Quartet after the death of bassist Malachi Favors Maghostut, and in November 2005 the new lineup headlined the California Institute of the Arts' Creative Music Festival. The concert was recorded, and it arrives on CD as *Tabligh*.

To say the new lineup is powerful would be a huge understatement. Smith elicits a symphony of sounds from his trumpet. Pianist Vijay Iyer seems more caffeinated than usual, even when he plays the Fender Rhodes electric piano. Bassist John Lindberg thumps and plucks so hard that he threatens to pop the woofers. Shannon Jackson —perhaps jazz's most bombastic percussionist, what with *Last Exit* and *Power Tools* on his résumé—beats his kit so feverishly that the drums must have nearly toppled from their stands.

Tabligh comprises four songs, and the group really stretches out. Smith begins with a clarion call that announces "Rosa Parks," and eventually a fusion groove emerges from the pulsating waves of the Rhodes and the drum kit. Smith blows bracing blasts over the gurgling electric piano and churning rhythm, and on a dime he turns inward. He demonstrates a willingness to give in quickly to his impulses. Sometimes he blows 16 notes in a single bar, and sometimes he drops only a note per measure. When he turns it on, his runs are majestic.

So are Iyer's. He's got the focus for much of "DeJohnette" (named for Jackson's predecessor in the Golden Quartet's drum chair), with his complicated, free-improv solo on the grand piano. Smith sits out for a while, and

the other three escalate their exchange into a rhythmic kerfuffle. Iyer rumbles around staccato style at the bottom, and finally Smith enters with a six-note ascending phrases that repeats and reappears throughout the rest of the tune.

After a shorter (eight-and-a-half-minute) piece called “Caravan of Winter” that begins as a dark and moody ballad and graduates to a breakneck battle, the quartet reaches the concert’s climax: the 24-minute epic title track. It begins innocently enough, with a reserved trumpet solo over a space-age synthesizer, but then Smith’s horn begins moaning and barking. The piece takes several minutes to establish its premise, and then the drama intensifies and gets to the point: four-way simultaneous soloing, violent and free.

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