

Rock & Roll Dope

John Sinclair

1969

I remember two and three years ago and longer writing columns for the *Fifth Estate* and trying to hip people to a new music and never getting anywhere—people just didn't seem to be ready for the high-energy jams for one reason or another. Maybe they weren't eating enough acid like people do now. But I feel very strongly right now that people are ready for a lot more high-energy music than they're getting from the pop stars, and the music is certainly out there waiting for them—waiting for you right now.

The music I'm talking about comes out of "jazz" roots rather than pop, blues, or rock and roll, and a lot of folks feel that it's "too far out" because of where it comes from, and the musicians are black but it's not like B.B. King and them, you dig, and besides you can't find their records very easy and you don't ever get to hear them live, like at the Grande, and what the fuck, I mean why should we be listening to that shit anyway man, I like rock and roll, you dig? and that's what I want to hear.

Well, all I'm trying to do is turn you on to something I know about, you know? I mean I KNOW about it, because I listen to it. And that's all there is to it. Just LISTENING to it, and getting out of your head for a minute and down to the natural facts. Because the music I'm talking about will turn your head AROUND, man, and make you hear things you never thought would happen. But then that's what you get thinking, like I always say.

Enough of this abstract bullshit. Some of the new records you might like to hear would be: the new SUN-RA jam on the ESP label, which is called "Nothing Is." The new album was recorded "live" a couple years ago while Ra was doing some gigs in New York State colleges with Burton Greene, Patty Waters, Guiseppe Logan, and some other maniacs.

ESP lined up a tour of colleges and got the New York State Council on the Arts to front the bread for the whole ruse. The music on the new album is really jive and fresh, and if you've ever seen Ra in concert this record'll bring back images of the shaking bells, marching around the auditorium playing and chanting, singing little melodies in joyous insane harmony. "We Travel the Spaceways." "Next Stop Mars." "Sun Ra and His Band from Outer Space." These are the cats to listen to, and "understand." (Which only means to get down, "stand under" and dig it.)

Marion Brown the beautiful black alto saxophonist and godfather of my child (who was likewise named for Sun-Ra—"Sunny"—you dig) has a new release on ESP-Disk also, called "Why Not." This record was made some two years ago and was supposed to be released on another label two years ago this month under the title "The Psychedelic Sounds of Marion Brown." If they would've done that then you'd all've been listening to him ever since. I mean you would've bought the record and dug it. But now you can anyway.

Marion's record features former Detroiters Stanley Cowell on piano in his first recording session. Stanley played with Charles Moore, John Dana and Ronnie Johnson as the Detroit Contemporary 4 for over a year just before he recorded this side, and I know a lot of neighborhood people will remember hearing and seeing Stan play with the DC4 at the old Artists' Workshop at Lower DeRoy, Community Arts, on the mall, and everywhere else the old band played. They sure were beautiful then. Whew!

Also featured on Marion's record is John Coltrane's final drummer, brother Rashied Ali, the most straight-ahead percussionist on earth. Rashied is bad. His drumming moves ahead and sideways at the same time, driving-with

great strength in all directions and covering everything that's going on in the rest of the band. Covering, like "I've got you covered." Taking care of business, is what Rashied does.

Another dangerous ESP-Disk is the first record by a young dude from the lower east side, Marzette Watts, a black painter who traded painting lessons to Pharoah Sanders in return for tenor saxophone lessons, and got it together. Marzette at that time (1964) lived a floor below Archie Shepp and two below LeRoi Jones at 27 Cooper Square in New York City. That was a far-out place. Marion Brown, Archie, Pharoah, and dozens of other madmen would hang out at Archie's and jam, using various extra-musical stimulants to get them into different musical vistas.

Marion told me once about a day when everyone dropped acid and started playing in Archie's place around noon. Four hours later a huge knock on the door and it was the Tactical Police troopers, helmets and all, demanding an end to the music.

Out on the street under the 3rd floor window people were standing gaping on the sidewalk and over the curbs, and traffic was lined up for blocks while stupified drivers tried to figure out what that sound was. It was the sound of crazed men, people, screaming and hollering to be free.

Marion said there was dope and shit all over the table but the pigs weren't even interested, they just wanted the fucking NOISE to stop. "It must have sounded like the end of the world," Marion said grinning.

Anyway, Marzette's first ESP-Disk has Byard Lacaster on alto saxophone, Clifford Thornton (who used to be with Pharoah in the New Art Ensemble, 1965) on trumpet and trombone. Karl Berger vibes, Sonny Sharrock guitar and others.

Sonny Sharrock has created one working solution to the problem of plain old line runs on guitar, licks and shit—Sonny Sharrock plays flashes of amplified sound, weird spaced-out hums and sound drifts, spreading his sound out as far as he can get it until it takes in the whole spectrum of sound. (The other solution is to overpower the simple guitar and make the amplifiers sing the song, e.g. brother Fred Smith, brother Wayne Kramer, where the power of the machinery is written into the songs just as the notes and words are written in, or happen. So the sound itself, the totality, becomes the thing, the thing that moves you and makes you scream. Makes me scream, anyway. Just like Archie Shepp does, just like Pharoah.) Just like Marzette Watts' band does in the record, and the song on the first side, "Backdrop to Urban Revolution." If you can relate to that.

Other records you should get—and I mean it, you should get at least one of these records the next time you go to the store, and take it home with you and listen to it when you get a chance. Smoke some good weed first, enough so that you're kind of spaced out. and feelin' plenty good, layin' back on a big pillow or on the bed with somebody you dig, got some time to lay around and get down, and then after you play "Sympathy for the Devil" you ease off the needle before the next song and slip on Archie Shepp's record "The Magic of JuJu," side one first. You might want to turn the volume down a little at first so you won't get scared, because Archie starts off right in the middle of a thing and moves straight ahead right up your spine and into your cells. Let this music inform your cells, and shape them. You'll dig it.

If you don't dig it right then, try the other side. A lovely melody starts it off, "You're What This Day is All About." The other things are nice too. But you've got to listen to it a few times, play it while you're doing something else and let it sneak up on you, but I guarantee you that when you do get down with it you'll be really happy you did.

Archie's new record, "The Way Ahead," is way ahead too. I wish you would buy these records and turn yourselves on to them. I wish the people on the radio would play more of them too, so you can hear them free and want to buy them for your family. But they will, soon enough.

John Coltrane's record "Cosmic Music" is a true testimonial to the gigantic Zenta Saint the late brother John Coltrane. He is joined with brother Pharoah Sanders, Trane's wife Alice on Piano, and three drummers including brother Rashied Ali. The songs include "Lord, Teach Me to Be," "The Sun," and "Manifestation." At one point you can hear John and his brothers chant "Let there be peace, and love and perfection, throughout all the earth, O God." Yes, yes, yes, let that be, let that be.

One other for now: The record you HAVE to have for your further benefaction is the monumental Pharoah Sanders album on the Impulse label, "Tauhid," with Sonny Sharrock and other heavy brothers, and alto and tenor saxophones, and the songs are plain beauty and truth. You may have heard, some time ago, the MC5 do one of Pharoah's melodies off the Tauhid album called "Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt," which I wrote some words for

Rob to sing. “Got to get out in the music, got to get out in the Sun/Got to get out of your heads now, got a lot to get done.”

Get these records, and listen to them. Please. You’ll love it. I don’t want to talk about it too much, because it’s too much like trying to talk a young lady into a hot quick fuck—you know it’s the best thing for her, but you don’t want to make it like that. But sometimes people just haven’t been able to get their hands and ears on the right information, and just like fucking girls, this music deserves a killer try at least. And, some say, it can make you feel almost as good.

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