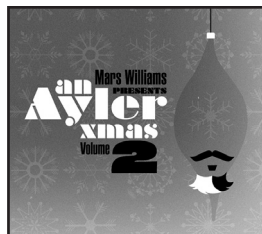


ALBERT AYLER
 ALBERT AYLER DONALD
 AYLER MICHAEL SAMPS
 ON LEWIS WORRELL RONALD
 SHANNON JACKSON
 MUSIC IS THE HEALING
 FORCE OF THE UNIVERSE

PETER BRÖTZMANN
 DIE LIKE A DOG QUARTET
 PETER BRÖTZMANN TOS
 HINORI KONDO WILLIAM
 PARKER HAMID DRAKE
 FRAGMENTS OF MUSIC, LIFE
 AND DEATH OF ALBERT AYLER



Music is the Healing Force of the Universe
 Albert Ayler | Peter Brötzmann (Jazzwerkstatt)
An Ayler Xmas, Vol. 2
 Mars Williams (Soulwhat/ESP-Disk')
 by Stuart Broomer

Among these recent releases related directly to Albert Ayler, there are multiple suggestions of the meanings and ambiguities of the life and work of a man who may, with Buddy Bolden, bookend jazz mythology.

There must be stranger releases than Jazzwerkstatt's two CD-set pairing albums by Ayler and German saxophonist Peter Brötzmann, but none comes immediately to mind. The Ayler CD is called *Music is the Healing Force of the Universe*, which is the name of a 1969 Impulse recording, his last studio record and arguably the most painful listening in the annals of free jazz, an awkward pastiche of funk and psychedelia representing either or both of Ayler's desperate desire for an audience and a record company's cynical redirect of an artist. This, however, isn't that record. Though it lacks any performance site or date, it's a frequently released May 1st, 1966 recording of an Ayler quintet with brother Donald (trumpet), Michel Samson (violin), Lewis Worrell (bass) and Ronald Shannon Jackson (drums). Taped on a portable recorder at a customer's table (at one point a voice is louder than the band), it's been issued on multiple labels (Base, Magic Music, Lone Star, Get Back) since the early '80s,

titles usually referencing Slug's Saloon. The nearest thing to a definitive version is a two-CD set on ESP-Disk' from 2005 that includes another track (the complete recording is a shade over 80 minutes, hence the second CD: this one clocks in at 65'36").

It's an interesting recording. Like a crazed village band with a repertoire of lachrymose ballads, erratic fanfares and forced marches, the quintet plays extended interlocking themes with brief scattered solos: Albert, always brilliant, explodes in ecstasy and terror from low-range blasts to whistling highs; Donald mines his limited but powerful, brash, brass blasts; and Samson, barely audible, scratches high frequencies at high speed. Like everything in Ayler's scant discography, it's worth hearing.

Compared to the Ayler, the titling questions of Brötzmann's CD are minor but meaningful. Recorded in 1993, the original title looks like *Die Like a Dog* with the lower-case "fragments of music, life and death of ALBERT AYLER" seeming like a sub-title. Brötzmann has been conditioning the title since, recording three CDs with the band called *Die Like a Dog Quartet* (Jazzwerkstatt has released a set of all four), so it seems less specifically about Ayler, more of a general statement. It's now further moderated by packaging it with the beneficently titled "Music is the healing force...", pressing the power of Ayler's music.

"Fragments..." is a masterpiece. Brötzmann leads a band of the first order and the homage to Ayler (a compound that includes rage at his East River death—explored in Brötzmann's brief note to "Healing Force") is deeply felt and consistently powerful. While the group only touches on Ayler's own themes in the work's first movement, the framing device of "St. James Infirmary" in the second (whether viewed as transformed English ballad or death-slab blues) is a powerful emblem of the roots Ayler's music pulled up and examined. Toshinori Kondo, extending his trumpet with alien-sounding electronics, is a terrific foil, with the two reaching cascading peaks in the concluding fourth movement. It's all driven along magnificently by bassist William Parker and drummer Hamid Drake.

The package focuses the Ayler/Brötzmann relationship. No musician has drawn more deeply from Ayler. Brötzmann's techniques and gestural vocabulary seem to have started there—the low blasts, smeared melodies, whistling highs, above all the maximized intensity. But it ends there: Brötzmann has developed his own powerful identity from those elements. There was a fundamental quality of light in Ayler's sound, something that made the gospel sources and religious titles viable, however unlikely they might have seemed, pointing to underlying qualities of speaking in tongues and divine inspiration. Brötzmann's music shares Ayler's vast humanity but not the transcendence. It's an existential music, of life redeemed only by the cognition of reality; witness the CD cover, emphasizing the animal, not the spirit. Each is extraordinarily powerful, each has a vision and realizes it.

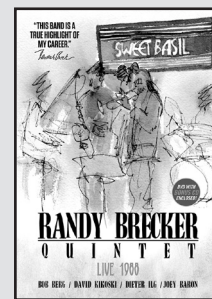
While Ayler's music is likely better known, appreciated and understood in Europe, it has a special power among a few American musicians for whom it somehow makes folk sources (even the idea of melody) accessible. While Jeff Lederer has elsewhere applied the style to Shaker hymns and whaling songs, Mars Williams—whose playing, like Lederer's, uncannily mirrors Ayler's technique and luminous, trebly sound—mixes his Ayler melodies with traditional Christmas songs on *An Ayler Xmas, Vol. 2*. Williams leads two different bands from two continents, a Chicago septet/octet and a Vienna quintet, and they play long medleys something like the ones from Slug's, but with "O Tannenbaum", "Joy to the World" and "Twelve Days of Christmas" mixing it up with "Spirits", "Bells" and "Love Cry". It's an energizing mix of holiday traditions and conventions with the soul-bracing apocalyptic energies of the Ayler style. The Chicago-based Witches

and Devils, with cornet player Josh Berman, trombonist Jeb Bishop, cellist Fred Lonberg-Holm and bassist Kent Kessler, plays with a raw, incendiary precision, lines tumbling over lines in a joyous paroxysm, a simultaneity of destruction and creation. With a tenor/trumpet frontline and Christof Kurzmann contributing reedy vocals as well as "lloops", the Vienna material is slightly thinner, but still charged with a spirit that seems to leap from the speakers.

"Yes, Virginia, there is an Albert Ayler..."

For more information, visit jazzwerkstatt.eu and marswilliams.com. Williams' Ayler Project is a *The Stone at The New School* Nov. 27th. See Calendar.

ON SCREEN



Live 1988
 Randy Brecker Quintet (MVD Visual)
 by Jim Motavalli

Most of the quality video of live jazz performance is from Europe. There is, amazingly enough, only one full-length U.S. television appearance by the classic John Coltrane Quartet—on Ralph Gleason's *Jazz Casual* in 1963. That's why we're lucky to have this intense performance by the Randy Brecker Quintet from Sweet Basil in 1988. The band played six nights at the West Village club and while the DVD plays like one continuous performance it was presumably culled from the best of the engagement.

The late Bob Berg blasts out some killer tenor, joined by a demonic Joey Baron (drums), Dave Kikoski (piano) and Dieter Ilg (bass). All the music is by Brecker, except for Cole Porter's "Love for Sale". Says Brecker, "This was all brand-new music played for the very first time that week at Sweet Basil, so everything was fresh. And Sweet Basil was the happening jazz club at the time, with the best ambient sound in New York, due to its wood floor and walls." What is captured here is an evening of bristling hardbop, recorded direct to two-track by Malcolm Pollack. The sound is good and the visuals (from what looks like two cameras) are sharply edited and have a distinct brownish hue and slightly blurry quality. A second disc provides the audio from the long-out-of-print LP released on GNP Crescendo.

The packaging is good, but more detail would have been welcome. The names of the tunes only appear on the DVD itself, for some odd reason. And one minor issue: the music is said to have been recorded Nov. 18th-20th, 1988 (10 days after Dukakis lost badly to George H.W. Bush). But according to Brecker in the liner notes, the LP was issued Jun. 15th, 1988. I wonder how they managed that.

Like many club sessions of the period, this is a blowing date. That's not a criticism. One wishes Ilg was more audible, but Brecker, Berg and Kikoski are all in peak form, Berg in particular at building excitement with upper-register squeals and Kikoski, mostly heard on piano, getting in some cooking electronic organ and synthesizer. There aren't many artifacts like this so—whenever this was recorded—it's great to have it around.

For more information, visit mvd2b.com. Brecker is at *Iridium* Nov. 23rd-25th. See Calendar.

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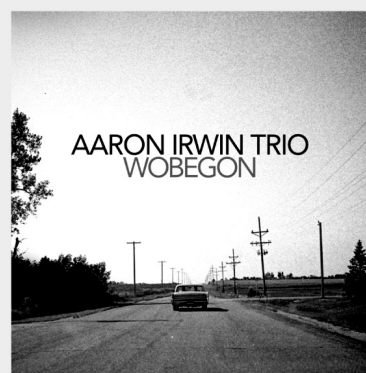


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