LAST NIGHT A RECORD CHANGED MY LIFE

Marc Ribot

The guitar alchemist genuflects before the **Albert Ayler Quintet**'s *Live At Slug's Saloon May 1, 1966* (Base, 1982)

It was the mid-'80s. I was playing in the Lounge Lizards, living on East 16th Street in New York. I was playing compositions that were to do with harmonics, they sounded kind of like bugle calls. And [NY pianist] Anthony Coleman said, "You should listen to Albert Ayler's Bells." I knew he was part of the pantheon of jazz geniuses, and very controversial, but I'd never done a close listen. Then I did. And I've been doing that ever since.

When I put the album on it was, "Oh yeah… all right." I wasn't analysing it – it was an artefact of a very intense quasi-religious experience, like you're standing in the back of a room in which there's a strange ritual going on, you hear a chicken squawk and see a bloody knife, and you're not sure what going on but you're certain something is!

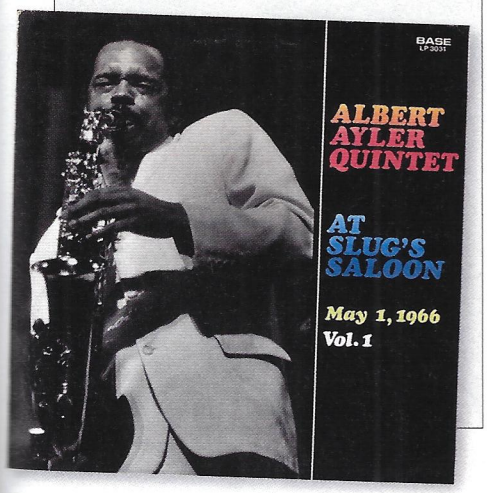
Ayler was influenced by bugle calls, church music, hymns. The first part is a hymn, but what it's praying for is what happens when the song progresses. It's like a diving board into something else, the chords come at you a mile a minute. It's a virtuoso/intellectual/physical feat.

It was the missing link between jazz and punk rock and made me understand everything I most needed from both. It made me understand that music can be a ritual in which musicians and audience engage, and how it can take people up and put them down in a different place.

You have to have listened to the stuff that came before it, and to have reached a point of frustration, in order for it to feel necessary. When I listen to it I find it incredibly funny and tender, with the desire for honesty and revelation. One thing Albert Ayler gives me is courage.

Something clicked when I heard it. Before that I didn't know what I was gonna do. And after that, I did know.

Marc Ribot's Songs Of Resistance 1942-2018 is out on September 14 on ANTI-.



SPACE ROCK PSYCHONAUTS HAWKWIND CONNECT WITH CLAPTON AND… MIKE BATT?

THE INCONGRUOUS collaboration has a noble history in rock, from Stanley Unwin guesting with the Small Faces to Karl 'Wimoweh' Denver's team up with Happy Mondays. Yet few have the double-take quality of Hawkwind's new album *Road To Utopia*, where reimagined songs from the group's first decade are given new orchestral frames by Mike Batt, the producer behind hits for Steeleye Span, Vanessa Mae and, of course, The Wombles.

"We met him when we were queuing up for visas at the American embassy in 2007," says chief Hawk Dave Brock. "I probably met him when he was working in the office at [early Hawkwind label] Liberty in 1970. Strange how your paths cross. Some fans probably won't like it but you have to do something different, don't you?"

Batt got involved after a proposed Hawkwind acoustic album began to acquire electric elements. Though Hawkwind weren't present when he added strings and brass to the tracks, their collaborative preparations for concerts reveal a lively creative dynamic. "Mike's a very clever, eccentric character," says Brock. "When we were rehearsing he was saying, 'Oh, you're two bars out…' he gives you a bollocking if things go wrong. And the first time we're going to play with the fucking orchestra is when we do it live! It'll be all right though. Is he a member of Hawkwind? I should bloody well hope not! We ad-lib a lot."

Batt plays piano on a new version of The Watcher, a Lemmy composition from 1972's *Doremi Fasol Latido*: the track also features the unmistakable guitar of Brock's early-'60s busking pal Eric Clapton. Reconnection was made when Brock contributed to Philip Norman's new biography of Clapton.

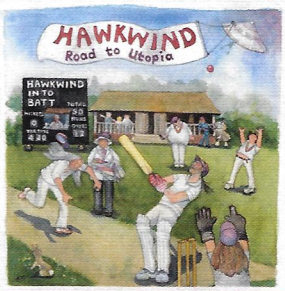
"They wanted to know all the bits and pieces about our background and the blues, when we used to sit around in Richmond playing our guitars," says Brock. "And we thought, Wouldn't it be good if we got Eric to play on The Watcher? It was really nice to see him – I probably hadn't seen him since he was in Cream. What did we talk about? Not the next project, this one." The *next* project, wonders MOJO? What's that? "Oh I dunno, who knows?" says Brock. (Intriguingly, Hawk manager/Brock's partner Kris Tait chips in with, "He's coming down next week.")

Another old comrade the record salutes is late, great Hawkwind poet/frontman Robert Calvert, who died 30 years ago this month: four of the nine songs are co-written by him. *The Road To Utopia*'s cricket-themed cover art also references Calvert's 1979 release Cricket Star. "On the sleeve Mike Batt's the umpire, Eric's in the pavilion coming out to bat, and Bob's there too," says Brock, "in the silver machine/flying saucer in the sky."

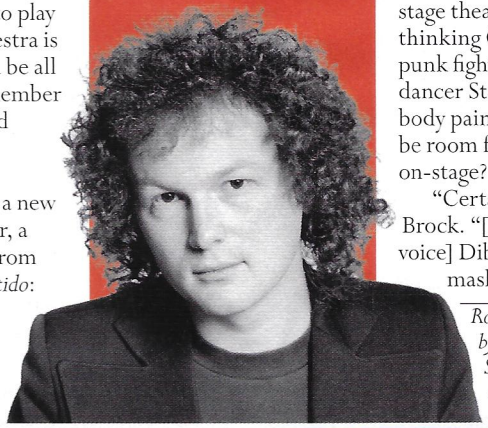
Still capable of surprise nearly five decades into their voyage, Hawkwind's orchestral tour begins in October. Following past stage theatrics – we're thinking Calvert's steam-punk fighter ace outfit or dancer Stacia's psychedelic body paint – might there be room for a Womble on-stage?

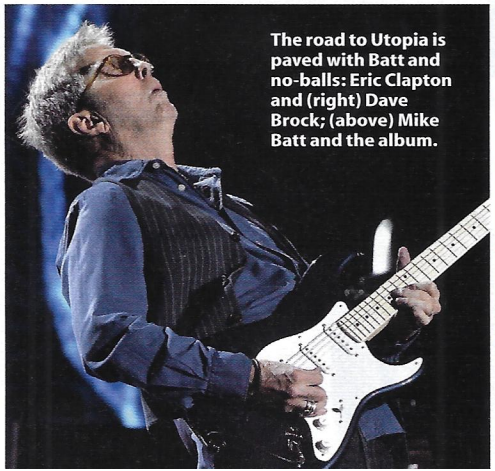
"Certainly not!" retorts Brock. "[Hawkwind bass/voice] Dibs could put a mask on though."

Road To Utopia is released by Cherry Red on September 14. See review on page 93.



"I hadn't seen Eric since he was in Cream."
DAVE BROCK





The road to Utopia is paved with Batt and no-balls: Eric Clapton and (right) Dave Brock; (above) Mike Batt and the album.

Getty (2), John Chase