



Released by:
Atavistic

Year of Release:
1966

Running time:
17 minutes

Rating:
NR

Color format:
B&W

Audio / Subtitles:
Stereo 5.1

Region Code:
1, NTSC

Aspect Ratio:
Full frame

16:9 enhanced?
No

Special Features*:
Four "Philosophical Proclamations" from Sun Ra

Trailer online:
No

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DVD REVIEW

MAGIC SUN (1966)

Directed by Phil Niblock

Review By David Carter

As part of their Unheard Music Series, Atavistic has released a 1966 short film of Sun Ra and His Outer Space Arkestra performing "The Magic Sun." Sun Ra and his various "Arkestras" were pioneers of experimental jazz since the 1950's. He continued breaking sonic boundaries up through the 80's and early 90's and is best remembered for his tour-de-force recording "Space is the Place" from the 1970's. While revered by his fellow musicians and critics, Sun Ra achieved very little mainstream success, largely due to the avant-garde nature of his music. Sun Ra's music is both powerful and polarizing, being either brilliant or unlistenable noise depending on the listener, but no doubt evoking a response.

Phil Niblock, an experimental musician himself as well as artist and filmmaker attempted to capture the energy of Sun Ra's music with "The Magic Sun." While it can be seen as an early form of the music video is so common today, it is by no means primitive. Niblock took extreme close up footage of the Arkestra's movements during the performance, opting to examine them as individuals rather than a unit. Niblock then uses only the negative of that footage. What the viewer is given is primarily a black screen with occasional flashes of white. The kinetic nature of the footage, while not necessarily in sync with the music, is very much a visual representation of Sun Ra's dynamic style of experimental jazz.

"The Magic Sun" is no doubt a must-have for Sun Ra's faithful. In addition to the performance, there are four "philosophical proclamations" from Ra himself from the same time period. Film lovers who are not familiar with Ra's work or experimental jazz as a genre will want to check out this DVD as well though. Niblock's footage is a psychedelic masterpiece that grabs the eye and pulls the viewer along with the frenetic pace of Ra's song. Ra's music and this film may not impress everyone, but serious film and music lovers will no doubt be pleased.

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