

Archie Shepp - Fire Music (1965/1995)

Written by bluesever (Bogdan Marszałkowski)

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A1 Hambone 12:05 A2 Los Olvidados 8:36 B1 Malcom, Malcom, Semper Malcom 4:40 B2 Prelude To A Kiss 4:41 B3 The Girl From Ipanema 8:18 + C1 Hambone (live version) 11:53
Alto Saxophone – Marion Brown Bass – Reggie Johnson (tracks: A1, A2, B2, B3) Drums – Joe Chambers (tracks: A1, A2, B2, B3) Tenor Saxophone – Archie Shepp Trombone – Joseph Orange Trumpet – Ted Curson

Some of the most exciting jazz albums to listen to are those that try to strike a middle ground between the mainstream and the Avant-garde. One such example is Archie Shepp's *Fire Music* : an often-fascinating album, rich in compositional and improvisational prowess. Employing a sextet including drummer Joe Chambers and alto saxophonist Marion Brown, Shepp puts together a record that is both challenging and accessible to most listeners.

Fire Music 's masterpiece is undoubtedly "Hambone." A multi-part composition, the song's highlights are the opening theme, Ted Curson's complex trumpet musings and a bluesy section featuring a tough and funky solo by Brown. The track's momentum is maintained with the thematically dense "Los Olvidados" which features another sterling contribution by Curson. The spoken word piece "Malcolm, Malcolm-Semper Malcolm" is a tribute to Malcolm X and features bassist David Izenzon and drummer J.C. Moses. Concluding the album is a bizarre version of "The Girl from Ipanema," with an solo by Shepp that is frankly, quite boring. Regardless, *Fire Music* is an album that belongs in any serious jazz fan's collection. ---Robert Gilbert, allaboutjazz.com

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One of forward-looking tenor man Archie Shepp's definitive early albums, 1965's *Fire Music* set the tone for much of what was to come over the next several years, both in Shepp's own career and in the jazz scene as a whole. Moving far beyond bebop toward more avant-garde realms, *Fire Music* was simultaneously a central document of the mid-'60s "New Thing" school of jazz and an arrow that pointed towards the subsequent explorations of Cecil Taylor, Ornette Coleman, et al. The title refers to an African ceremony, and there's an urgency here that's fueled by the civil rights unrest of the day and aimed towards the burgeoning Black Power movement, both of which would remain key jazz subtexts for some time. *Fire Music* is far from the first free jazz album; Coleman and others had already experimented with free-form improvisation before this. But it subverts the conventions of the bebop generation thoroughly, turning melodies and harmonies both inward and outward upon themselves, throwing open the doors to open-ended structures and tonal experimentation. Even the "straight" tunes interpreted here are given a funhouse-mirror treatment, stretching them beyond expectations. Just as psychedelia expanded rock's palette in the '60s, so Shepp's *Fire Music* helped broaden the possibilities of jazz. ---Jim Allen, AllMusic Review

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