

Brother Ahh - Sound Awareness (1972)

Written by bluesever

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A1 Beyond Yourself (The Midnight Confession) 22:04 Cello – Pat Dixon Flute, French Horn – Brother Ahh Percussion – Barbara Burton Voice [Soprano] – Barbara Grant

B1 Love Piece

Featuring – The 90 Voice Sound Awareness Ensemble Flute, French Horn – Brother Ahh Percussion – M'Boom Re:percussion Ensemble Rap – Max Roach Tuba – Howard Johnson

Robert Northern or better known as BROTHER AHH is one of those jazz musicians who has been around forever having established himself as long ago as the late 50s after a classical French horn education at Austria's Vienna State Academy and worked with many of the greats that spanned the 60s, 70s and beyond including Donald Byrd, Dizzy Gillespie, John Coltrane, Eric Dolphy, Charlie Haden, Freddie Hubbard, Thelonious Monk, McCoy Tyner, Miles Davis, Gil Evans and Don Cherry (as well as many others) but is probably most famous for his run with the great Sun Ra as the french horn player in his Astro-Affinity Arkestra in the early 70s on albums such as "Atlantis" and "Sound Sun Pleasure!!" Northern himself emerged from The Bronx in NYC and also studied at the Manhattan School of Music before heading off to Austria.

While playing his gigs with Sun Ra, Norton was becoming extremely intrigued by non-Western music styles and ultimately visited and studied in Africa throughout the 70s. As well as contributing to a massive number of albums by other artists including John Coltrane's seminal "Africa/Brass" in 1961, McCoy Tyner's "Tender Moments" and Thelonious Monk's "Orchestra In Town Hall" amongst countless other appearances, by 1972 Norton began to release material under his own pseudonym BROTHER AHH with his debut SOUND AWARENESS being released on the Strata East label in 1972 after finding time away from the Sun Ra Arkestra's demanding schedule. Keeping in the spirit of the avant-garde and otherworldly sound that Sun Ra had been developing throughout the 60s and well into the 70s, BROTHER AHH explored similar territories with emphasis on two side-long tracks that included the extradorinaiy talents of Max Roach on drums and his percussion ensemble M'Boom as well as a 90-piece vocal choir. Despite the similarities in approach, the music sounds nothing like the world of Sun Ra and

comes off as nothing else i've ever experienced.

One (of the original Vinyl LP) consisted of the multi-movement piece "Beyond Yourself (The Midnight Confession)" which was broken down into the segments "Introduction," "Rap," "Midnight Confession," "Fear," "Demons," "Morning Song" and "Dawn" that tells the tale of a man's struggle to eschew the temptations in life in order to become a monk. Musically speaking this one delivers an avant-garde mix of minimalistic jazz and flute (both played by AHH) that sprawl into lysergic atmospheric expanses of a sound journey that evokes an ethereal and spiritual vibe. Although the track can sprawl on for lengthy segments, there are moments of spaced out echoey noises with startling shouted lyrics before chilling out into a haunting yet mellow mode again complete with ghostly voices reaching to the heavens (kind of reminds me of the vocals on the theme song from the original Star Trek only much more freaky.) The track gets super freaky as it meanders with intermittent echoing percussive drives, a subdued lugubrious horn section and the aforementioned ghostly vocals. There are also times that the echo effect is so strong that it begins to sound like a whale song under the sea.

Side two consists the single track "Love Piece" which contrasts greatly (towards the end) as it experiments much more with a heavier emphasis on various styles of ethnic percussive styles performed by Max Roach and his ensemble while vocal outbursts serve as a faculty of agitation to instruct the instruments to perform as well as prodding the 90-voice choir to eschew a total breakdown in order. The piece starts out as a single flute solo that is airy and light sounding more like some sort of ancient Japanese koto music from the Edo period with only a few sparse shakers as percussion, but a few minutes in the horn and vocals fire up with the horns dominating at first with fiery interplay between the French horn, the flute and a tuba. Once the percussion kicks in though, all hell breaks loose as Max Roach delivers a poetic rant about desperation and destruction that starts to sound something like a mix of an African-American gospel service and a tripped out Haitian voodoo ritual all dressed up with avant-garde jazzy time signatures, intermittent instrumental accompaniments and a crowd that gets more and more worked up after every spoken word statement.

For anyone into the most freaked out aspects of Sun Ra's works, this will feel right at home and although in the same ballpark isn't an exact replica of that great Ra's style. This is another bizarre mixture altogether of psychedelic lysergia, avant-garde jazz, tribal rhythms and philosophical reflections taking the listener down extended journeys into bizarre soundscapes that paint diverse colors and varied texturized canvases. While Northern would continue to release more of his own works, he would also continue to collaborate with a diverse array of artists in the jazz world and beyond as well as expand his interests in the different ethnic musical styles of the world. On this bizarre debut called SOUND AWARENESS though, he managed to create a completely wild and unrelenting ride from placid detached ethereal soundscapes to a full-on stampede of percussive drive that ends the album in full bombast. This

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is an excellent album that carries on the Sun Ra type traditions and takes them somewhere that Ra himself never envisioned. ---siLLy puPPy, progarchives.com

The work of Robert Northern is among the most seminal, and sinfully neglected, of the later of these two. It is a music of profound intellect, artistry and identity. A social and political music, filled with optimism and joy. His work falls within a great legacy of organized sound – one far too often ignored, which inherited what John Coltrane proposed through his last efforts on earth. Music as a productive means for social change – an indication of a higher plane. The voice of a people, swelling toward the universal – past race, gender, class, and culture – a towering creative gesture, representing the humanity possessed by all. ---blogthehum.wordpress.com

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