Ornette Coleman - Chappaqua Suite (1965)

Part I 21:25
Part II 19:00
Part III 17:40 *play*
Part IV 21:58

Line-Up:
Ornette Coleman (as, tp)
Pharoah Sanders (ts)
David Izenzon (b)
Charles Moffett (d)
Joseph Tekula (dir) unidentified large studio band.

NYC, June 15, 16 & 17, 1965

Recorded in 1965, this music was commissioned for the soundtrack of Conrad Rooks' cult film of same name. Ultimately, a Ravi Shankar score was opted for instead of this one. I've never seen "Chappaqua," and I've not heard Shankar's score, but hearing this album I can't believe anyone turned this stuff down! The score is fantastic, as you would expect from Coleman. The music is evocative and seems as though it would make a superb accompaniment to film. Fortunately, it also works fantastically as an album all by itself, so all was not wasted. The CD liner notes claim that director Rooks hesitated to use the music because it was so beautiful in and of itself, and he feared that the score's many merits might conflict with or even overshadow the actual film. I can accept that, but the liner notes go on to say that Rooks "kept this recording to offer it in an album of two LPs to all those fascinated by the musical world initiated by Ornette Coleman." You can believe that, or not, but the truth is that this recording is only available as a fairly cheesy and hard-to-find 2-disc (though its just over 79 minutes in total) expensive French import. And as far as I know this is the only way its ever been available, so those lofty idealistic claims don't go so far with me.

The permutation of the Ornette Coleman trio in action here includes Charles Moffett and David Izenson (the same line-up as on the remarkable "Golden Circle" recordings and in the landmark '62 Town Hall concert). Pharoah Sanders (!) makes a cameo for an added bonus. And on top of that, the whole performance is accompanied by a studio orchestra (ten musicians? eleven? there are conflicting reports on this matter). Pretty much, the trio do their thing, and the orchestral players fill in, adding color to the music and giving the whole affair a thicker and healthier sound. But sometimes, many times, things really heat up and there's some fierce back-and-forth between the trio and the orchestra. These moments give this score a real intensity that helps to make it, I feel, a very important Coleman recording. Coleman had by this point had some limited experience working with orchestral performers (for example on the Town Hall concert), and he would pursue further interest in the area with such recordings as "Skies of America." If you have any interest in jazz music composed for film soundtracks, check out Miles Davis's score for Louis Malle's "Elevator to the Gallows," Shafi Hadi & Charlie Mingus's score for John Cassavetes' "Shadows" (some of which is on "Mingus Ah Um"), and the score for Michael Snow's "New York Eye & Ear Control," which features the likes of Albert Ayler, Don Cherry, and Roswell Rudd.

Those are all pretty great. Oh, and then there's always the score to "Anatomy of Murder," obviously. In addition to "Chappaqua" and the later "Naked Lunch" soundtrack, Coleman did a soundtrack for another film, "Who's Crazy," around the same time with the same Trio line-up. I've heard a good chunk of it, and its really really good, and covers some of the same material performed in Stockholm for the Golden Circle concerts. But like so many other crucial Coleman recordings ("Crisis," the Great London Concert, the remaining material from the '62 Town Hall Concert, etc.) it is not now in print, and probably won't be any time in the near future (or maybe ever). Unlike the rest of the Town Hall material though, "Who's Crazy" was issued on vinyl as an import (italian?) many years ago (good luck finding it!). There's also a short documentary which films them laying down the "Who's Crazy" tracks, which I highly recommend tracking down. ---C. Burkhalter

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