



Peter Niklas Wilson

S p i r i t s R e j o i c e !

**Albert Ayler
and his message**

translated into English by Jane White

wolke

To Walter Lachenmann

The publisher would like to express its sincere thanks to both our dedicated translator Jane White and to Gordon Lobban, who provided the impetus for the creation of this English edition and supervised it to its conclusion.

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ALBERT

THE FIRST GREAT PAST FROM THE FAST GENERAL
PASTS WAS ALWAYS MID MELODY IS ALWAYS MID
MELODY

TIMBRE FETTERS SPLINTERED THE LENGTH OF
HISTORICALLY GNAWN

INVOCATION IN NO OLD KNOWN SENSE, THIS
TRANSMISSION REMARKABLY IMPOSSIBLE TO
SIEVE

WHATEVER IT WAS TURNED AGAINST HIM
ATTEMPTING TO SHED ITS OWN ILLUSIONS
AND WHOLLY INCAPABLE OF INTERFERING
WITH HIS APPROACHES TO A WITHDRAWING
EARTH

IT'S THE EXPOSED PULP CHAMBERS DELIVERS
US TO AN INSTANTANEOUS NO-NAME BASIS

AREAS OF ACCUMULATED SWEAT UNRELATED
ANATOMICALLY BUT RELATIVE IN THEIR
HUMILITY: ice-cold cigarette

I'm telling!

Paul Haines

Preface

"I still regard it as the jazz equivalent of the chimpanzee paintings that are said to have fooled some art critics many years ago. Ayler's squeaks, yodelling, and carryings-on (much of this sounds like New Year's Eve in Times Square) are either the work of a dastardly clever joker or a lucky amateur." This is the opinion of a critic writing in *Stereo Review* magazine, not in 1965, but rather in April 1992, on the occasion of the rerelease of the CD of Ayler's 'Love Cry' (according to the aforementioned critic, quite simply "an audio nightmare"). This is not an isolated opinion. Stanley Crouch, who wrote eulogies to Ayler's music in the 70s, now rejects it as amateurish and simplistic. To this day, Ayler has been denied the timeless classic status, which avant-gardists like John Coltrane, Eric Dolphy and Ornette Coleman finally achieved. Ayler's music remains controversial. For some he was a prophet, for others a charlatan, though there is very little doubt that he left an enduring legacy. No one who played with him was left untouched by the experience. Most of those he played with recognise that he profoundly changed their lives. And many who listened to him also fell under his spell. Would the music of a Peter Brötzmann, Charles Gayle, Frank Wright, David S. Ware, Roscoe Mitchell or Evan Parker be conceivable without his inspiration?

As controversial as Ayler remains to this day, the basis for a factual discussion of his contribution to the music of the 60s is thin. Following Ekkehard Jost's sound analytical remarks in his book 'Free Jazz' (1975) and Valerie Wilmer's basic biographical observations in 'As Serious As Your Life' (1977) very little more has been written about Ayler and many aspects of his life, his music and its intellectual (and spiritual) background remain obscure – impetus for this study, which follows on from these works.

A quarter of a century after Ayler's death it is not easy to shed light on these unknown areas. In the intervening years many of Ayler's former friends and musician colleagues have died or disappeared into obscurity. Call Cobbs, Henry Grimes, Beaver Harris and Charles Tyler are no longer alive; Earle Henderson and Norman Howard are untraceable. Mary Parks (alias Mary Maria), Ayler's last partner, and Arlene Ayler, his (divorced) wife, refuse all contact. I was only

able to contact Edward Ayler, Albert's father, and his brother Donald after much research. Their recollections and information were invaluable and I thank them for their kindness and friendly welcome in Cleveland. For Ayler's career since 1960 I was fortunate to be able to speak to an array of his contemporaries, without whose helpfulness, indeed enthusiasm, this book would not have been possible: Amiri Baraka (Newark/New Jersey), Paul Bley (Cherry Valley/New York), Bobby Few (Paris), Bill Folwell (Belleaire/Florida), Joel Freedman (Westport/Connecticut), Jon Goldman (Cleveland/Ohio), Milford Graves (Queens/New York), Paul Haines (Fenelon Falls/Canada), Bill Hess (Tenns Grove/New Jersey), Stafford James (Paris), Leroy Jenkins (Brooklyn/New York), Howard Johnson (New York), Sunny Murray (Paris), Gary Peacock (Claryville/New York), Lloyd Pearson (Cleveland/Ohio) Michel Samson (Louisville/Kentucky), Bernard Stollman (Kingston/New York), John Szwed (New Haven/Connecticut), John Tchicai (Davis/California), Bob Thiele (New York), Steve Tintweiss (Queens/New York), Henry Vestine (Eugene/Oregon) and Tony Viscomi (Easton/Pennsylvania).

I would like to thank Larry Glover, Carl Miller and Mary Turne for their help with my research in Cleveland. Keith Knox and Peeter Uuskyla gave me important information about Ayler's stay in Sweden and Keith Knox and Ingrid Zakrisson went to great lengths to translate articles and comments by Swedish contemporaries. Michael Cuscuna, Gudrun Endress, the Fondation Maeght (St-Paul de Vence), the Berlin Free Music Production, John Gray, Mike Hames, Ed Hazell, Andreas Kliber, H. Lukas Lindenmaier, Dan Morgenstern, Roy Morris, Lewis Porter, Mathias Rissi, Nir-Assif Tsahar, Werner X. Uehlinger, Valerie Wilmer, Carl Woideck and Ben Young all gave me important information and valuable photographic and audio materials. Paul Haines and Norman Weinstein kindly gave me permission to publish their poems dedicated to Albert Ayler. I am also indebted to the staff at the Jazz-Institut in Darmstadt, the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University and the many branches of the New York Public Library for their practical help with the bibliographical research. This project in its present form would not have been possible without a generous research bursary from the American Council of Learned Societies (and I would not have received this bursary without the support of Dieter Glawischnig und Ekkehard Jost). Last, but not least, I would like to thank my friends from the band Holy Holy – Alexander Dannullis, Dirk-Achim Dhonau, Michael Haase, Nicola Kruse and Hannes Wienert –, with whom I explored Ayler's universe of sound.

Peter Niklas Wilson

Preface to the English edition

Music has always been important to me but the joys of listening to jazz came later. From adolescence to middle age a bubbling brew of British prog rock, jazz rock, West Coast experimentation and the music of Shostakovich fuelled my listening. Electric period Miles Davis was my entry point. A door opened into a vast, complex musical world. Navigation was not easy, with hundreds, thousands even, of new avenues to explore; a lifetime of fresh listening lay ahead.

Then one day, out of nowhere, Albert Ayler burst in. I'd heard nothing like this before. Who was this man? Musically, where did he come from? Why did I find his playing so exhilarating? Sleeve notes gave glimpses into his life and work. These often stressed how important a figure he was in the ongoing development of jazz but information was very hard to come by; I could find nothing which was widely available in print, only references to a few articles in long unavailable jazz magazines or academic papers.

By chance I discovered that, indeed, a book had been written about the life and work of Albert Ayler, but only published in the German language. Years passed; retirement arrived; Covid 19 arrived; lockdowns arrived and one dark, Scottish winter's day in December 2020 I decided to pursue the idea of having this book published in the English language. Shelves groan under the weight of books on the "Giants of Jazz", to have so little on such a seminal figure as Albert Ayler seemed, to me, almost criminal.

I am very grateful to Peter at Wolke Verlag for taking on the re-publication project and to Jane White for translating the original text. My sincere gratitude and thanks goes to both of you.

I hope this publication leads to further appreciation of the phenomenal, unique and important talent that was Albert Ayler. He was a shooting star; he blazed through all too quickly but his light still shines.

Gordon Lobban
Edinburgh, Scotland, November 2021